

DAMIEN TAVIS TOMAN

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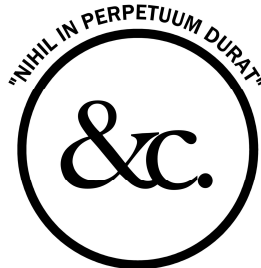
# RELIQUARY,

*Or The Bisection of the Wasp*

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Two Thousand and Five

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*The Author at Age 23, July 2005*

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## PART ONE: MISCELLANIES

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### INTRODUCTION.

I write from a place called Mt. Marion, which is nearest to a town named Saugerties, of which you certainly have not heard. This may be a petition for rescue; I may be shouting to you, from my prison behind the mountains and the snow banks, to seek me out where I cower in the wilderness and carry me to your great city of warmth and humanity—to return me to my own. This may be the reason for my writing this—but I am too timid to affirm it. The forests here are silent and stern. They stand over me and threaten to render me as noiseless and motionless and eternal as they; so like a hunted, quivering owl's dainty, I remain quiet and close to my hole. I do not move. For my whole life, I have not moved.

I stole into your city yesterday, on the

impractical assumption that I could appear as one of you. I wore a loosened neck-tie. I wore a loose shirt; I fixed my hair loosely; I assumed a loose smile and spoke in loose tones about subjects both bawdy and adroit. I rode there on a train. Surrounded by all of you, in your lit windows, in your brave, towering buildings, I felt your courage and was jubilant—unbound, nearly airborne. I walked boldly upon ground blest by your feet and sacred to human use. If I had died then, I would have been found in mere moments, encircled, mourned by droves of familiar strangers, and borne away amidst the pomp of flashing signs and streets that never go dark.

If I die here, not even the wind will mourn me. I will be, to all the jagged, groaning

branches, as one more squirrel, or one more crow, or one more withered fern. The winter will, after all, claim its yearly due. The trees will stand bitter and stoic as always, frowning down the cold and careless centuries. Their roots will wend about my bones, dividing me without concern and embracing me never. Without me, these mountains will be even less human.

Today, my wife found in my wallet a photograph image of a handsome boy, with fine blond hair, wearing makeup on his face and a lacey, black bra. She knew how I envied the boy in the picture, and I looked like a fool whilst trying to explain my reasons for having it with me.

I'll tell you the truth. The boy is standing in the doorway of an apartment. I imagine he must be in the city. He is beautiful in the way that the city makes one beautiful; so free that he cannot be fake. In the

city, there is no deceit. Everyone lies and everyone believes. They believe their own lies and they treat with generous courtesy the lies of others. The boy is beautiful in a way that boys—and girls too—will not and cannot be in the country. Country boys are animals; nature gave them camouflage, loud snorts, and antlers of various sizes. Girls are all the same color and exist to be herded from one pasture to another. In the country, there is prowess, but there is no plumage.

I, like the boy in the photograph, was born with plumage. I strut proudly through a gauntlet of saliva, hooves, and horns. The city knows beauty. If I met that boy in the country, I would kiss him. I would kiss him in the city too.

My wife knew this and she did not hide her offense. Sometimes I wonder whether she does not wish I were more "blue-collar." To be blue-collar is a fine and noble thing, she says. She owns the Communist Manifesto;

she is used to the scent of her own sweat.

Sometimes she catches me pouting and fawning for the mirror. I'm a poser and a piner over skinny boys who work at banks. I wonder why she loves me—but she does.

These are the confessions of a dour and dark-minded pansy from the blue hills of New York. (January 10, 2005)

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#### TESTAMENT.

I can no longer go on living, day to day, with the inexhaustible excuse that "I'll kill myself tomorrow." Is this not merely a subterfuge for my hoping that with tomorrow will come an excuse to live?

I was born with but one thing to accomplish—one thing to prove: that my life is unnecessary and offensive, and it is for me alone to end it. I was endowed by God with exactly enough intuitive insight to understand my own uselessness. My only use, God knows and I

know, is to dispose of myself.

Shall we suppose, only for the moment, that my purpose was not to die, but to live? Even then, why would I want to? What lies ahead of me but misery and toil, struggle and despair? What lies ahead of me but to witness and abet the misery, toil, struggling, and despair of they whose world I occupy? Happiness—the dancing lure of ravenous Fate—exists to lead us into torment. Happiness would be no one's goal if it were not continually yanked away from him. Happiness is a fiction. The most a man can have is purpose, and I have none. Even purpose hides a hook, and the noblest of men shall be impaled upon it.

No—no purpose have I but to die; to peer beyond the translucent lure and lunge, with sublime and unclouded clarity of intent, for the hook itself—and pray to be devoured; pray that I am not thrown back—into life.

So I am called pathetic, and a coward, and an ungrateful despoiler of life's inherent rewards. So I am called a betrayer of love. Good. Then I am called *something!* Something other than "alive;" alive and struggling my way deeper into the inescapable bonds of death—to what end?

What have I sought to be called, after all? A poet? A philosopher? A man of beauty—a man of profound thoughts? And am I any of these things? There is no person who, speaking truth, may say that I am. So all other purposes being failed and forsaken, I am left with only my final purpose—my death—before me. I can tarry, waste days, steal the light of the sun from they who yet belong under it; but why? What? *Life?* Has not the world enough of it already? Even now may I turn my head, and look out of the window, and see in the briefest glance so much life that the most abandoned of gluttons would be satisfied! Does

life then need me to fill it? Can it therefore be pretended that I need life? No—I need no more of life, and life requires no more of me. We are, I am sure, ready to part company.

But are you not ready to part company with me? Is it that you have not yet taken your fill of my suffering? Would you like to hear more of it? Amen, false friend! I shall fill a book with my bile, and spleen, and anguish, and loathing! I shall fill a book, and perhaps then you will have enough! Open to any page, and it shall be as if I never departed. My complaints will be as new as when first you heard them uttered, since you enjoyed them so much, and would have me repeat them forever.

And what of my flesh, beloved? Shall it no longer be a comfort to you once it is gone to rot in the earth? Be consoled, and cry not for pity, darling one. Have you not my words in a book? Have you not my photograph enshrined in

plainness and in secrecy?  
My flesh was the same as  
another man's! Have his,  
then, and be satisfied that  
you still have from me  
those things which only I  
could provide. Be not so  
shallow and trifling as to  
mourn my feeble flesh and  
the blasphemous heat  
from my idle breath! Let  
me not think that I loved a  
lover of flesh!

I know there is a  
book which begins in  
much the same manner  
as does my own. After  
this, it continues by  
stating that all is one; joy  
and grief are but two  
rocks in the same river,  
and it is of no more  
consequence that ten  
thousand die than that a  
baby starling falls from its  
nest. Indeed, who is it  
that can, in the end,  
rightfully weigh  
consequence against  
consequence? Futility  
and negation! The show's  
a bore! I want to die.  
Who can say I am wrong?

Here is something  
tender. Once, when I first  
fell in love, I looked to  
tomorrow and feared that  
it would not come. A  
lovelier net was never

woven, of such luminous  
strands, which, when I fell  
into them, were nothing  
but light, having no  
matter, substance, or  
reality. Must I be in love  
forever, knowing that it is  
in all parts a promise and  
in no part a deliverance?  
Shall I fall in love every  
day to find purpose—and  
disappointment—in every  
day that follows?

May it be that,  
when I am dead, your love  
and your hope for love will  
be annihilated with me,  
and with it your vain and  
insipid trust that life must  
have meaning, or else you  
would not be living it.  
Was I your meaning?  
Then join me in all haste  
and exchange the  
intangible net of light for a  
trustworthy bed of  
shadows. Or do me the  
honor of living in solitude  
and succumbing no more  
to the mischief of cheerful  
anticipation. If my death  
is required for you to  
grieve as I grieve in life,  
then the cost (though it  
may be truthfully nothing)  
is justified. Perhaps a life  
spent in the black pit of  
ceaseless, implacable  
mourning will teach you



this, and your example will give the world a truth worth marveling at. (April 6, 2005)

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NIGHT-SWIMMING: An Interpretive Memory

Time paused for a moment, as if curious, and Laura seemed to see it as it idled in the corner of Jacques' bedroom. Laura scrutinized time through a silken screen of voices, but her eyes could not hold it, and it rushed out past the boundaries of her perception, drawing its veil behind it. The voices of those in the room with Laura now seemed too loud, as a trickle become a torrent. Laura felt crushed. She wondered whether she was truly among friends there; how she could tell if they were friends or not. She wondered how she was regarded. She returned to the voices. Where was her name among them? Names were being said—some familiar, others not—none belonging to her. Some

names bore a face, a memory, a link to other faces. So many faces! How could she ever hope to be recognized in the midst of them all? She had lost track of the conversation. Her memories were not required. She thought of asking, "Do you know my name? When you say my name, does my face appear in your mind? If you could conjure me up simply by saying my name, would you? If not, why am I here? Because I am hard and heavy and bound to matter, and my leaving would disturb the matter in which we are submerged. I am less disturbing if I stay. Jesus—what are you talking about now?"

"It's so hot in here," Pamela complained as she changed her position on the bed and tugged on the seat of her shorts. "When are we going out to the pool?"

"I just wanted to wait for Damien to get here," said Jacques, his soft voice curled by a cultivated whimper of boredom. He slouched

further against the wall, his back against a Nirvana poster, and stretched his legs—covered in twisted, reflective little hairs—far out in front of himself, so that his feet could rest on Pamela's lap. Jacques was barefoot now; his pink and blue flip-flop sandals reposed like two pups by a fire, on the printed pillow of his double bed. "What time is it?"

Laura was the only one wearing a watch, and Jacques' alarm clock was still blinking valiantly beneath the bed, where it had evidently been knocked that morning. "It's nearly a quarter-to-nine," Laura answered. "Suzy was supposed to come, but she got grounded again, so I guess it's just Damien. He's an interesting boy."

"Interesting,"

Pamela repeated bemusedly, "That's one way of putting it. I think he's a freak. But then, why else would Suzy have been making out with him after, like, two minutes of knowing him? The little slut."

Laura's eyes narrowed. "Isn't Suzy only, like, thirteen hears old?"

"She'll be fourteen in September," Pam affirmed, "but she tells all her boyfriends that she's fifteen, except for the *really* old ones, who think she's seventeen."

"And how old is Damien?" Laura asked.

"Fifteen, I think," said Pam, looking to Jacques.

"Fifteen," said Jacques, nodding.

Laura nodded too. For a section of a minute, they could hear the digital alarm clock humming under the plush comforter that sagged off the side of the bed.

"Do you want to put on some music?" Pamela asked.

"Sure, OK," Jacques said, gesturing to an almost vacant CD rack by the wall at the opposite end of the bed. "Whatever you like."

Pam leaned over to peruse the selection. "You have Nirvana and Tori Amos. And one album from the Goo Goo Dolls."

"That's just an empty case, actually," Jacques said. "I think I left the CD at school."

"OK, so Nirvana and Tori. Jesus, Jacques—what ever happened to variety?" Pam snorted, pulling out a jewel case.

"Kurt and Tori are all I need, man," Jacques answered. "They're my male and female counterparts. They balance me out."

"I think Marilyn Manson is my male counterpart," Laura inserted, pushing her chest out a bit to display the makeup-smeared face on the front of her oversized black t-shirt.

"Then who's your female counterpart?" wondered Pam.

Laura could think of no immediate answer, and anyway, the doorbell was ringing. They heard the footsteps of Jacques' father upstairs as he trotted in his slippers to answer the summons.

"That's Damien," said Jacques.

Jacques' father's deep, accented voice was

heard. A younger voice responded, saying "thank you," and "sir." The older man shuffled back to where he came from, and fleet steps ticked down the wooden stairs. Jacques left his place on the bed and went to the door of his room. Pam kept her place and so did Laura.

"Hey," said Jacques, a few steps outside the doorway, as the newcomer's feet fell silently upon the carpet of the den.

"Jacques," the voice of Damien responded, "How are you?"

"Awesome," said Jacques with an earned inflection of buried enthusiasm, "We're just hanging out in the bedroom right now. Come on in."

Jacques flitted back to his original place at the top of the bed, shaking the table lamp as he fell into a pose. Damien appeared in the doorway with a backpack over his shoulder. He met everyone's eyes with a secretive wisp of a smile and slipped past Laura to lay his pack in the corner.

Then he stood, facing Laura and Pamela, with his hands dropping into his pockets. Pamela greeted him finally with a mordant, pawing wave.

"Hi, Pam," Damien said, "What's up?" He anticipated no answer. Pam delivered a shrug.

Jacques motioned toward the corner by the door. "Damien, this is our friend Laura. Laura, Damien."

They shook hands; Laura remained seated. "Damien," she said, "Cool name."

"Laura," Damien smiled again, "Cool shirt."

"You like Manson," Laura asked hopefully.

"I appreciate what he's doing," Damien said, sitting cross-legged on the soft floor. "I just read his autobiography, actually."

"Yeah, I read that too," said Laura. "Crazy."

"Less crazy, I thought, than merely *detached*," said Damien. "He's a superb example of a person's ability to mold himself to such an extenuated degree that he no longer resembles his natural core, but has, for

all purposes, become a thing of artifice. For that, I would call Marilyn Manson exemplary. But he sabotages himself through appearances. By drawing his audience's focus to the spectacle that he presents outwardly, his message is made facile, and he excuses himself from the need for profundity, though intellectually, he appears capable of some depth. Likewise, his devotees exhibit such shallowness and lack of discernment, that though they be spurred and inclined through some manner of revolution by Manson's anthemic goadings, still they have not a tangible banner under which to rally, and no practical nucleus of common thought. To practice the anarchy that Manson promotes would mean dismantling everything against which he would have them rebel; and since rebellion itself is the only creed upon which they are agreed, it is necessary that the objects of their contempt remain fixedly in place. Because

they worship Hate, it is those things which they hate that they are, in all reality, worshiping. This, at least, is what I've observed."

"Dude," asked Pam, looking deeply puzzled. "Where do you get this stuff?"

"How old did you say you were?" Laura asked Damien.

"Fifteen," Damien replied.

"And which school do you go to?" Pamela inquired.

"I, uh, dropped out," said Damien, "A while ago."

"Anyway," said Laura, "I was just saying a minute ago that I think Marilyn Manson is my male counterpart, like Kurt Cobain is Jacques'. Jacques, of course, *needs* a male counterpart, because he's gay. But I can't figure out who my female counterpart is."

"I should think," said Damien, "That Manson is sufficiently androgynous to function as both your male and your female counterparts."

"Yeah, I guess," said Laura.

"Who wants to go night-swimming?" Jacques asked loudly.

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A PITY.

I have accomplished all that I am capable of in this life. I have produced one daughter (poor, accursed creature!), I have married two unfortunate women, I have written—I think—one good song, and hundreds of bad songs, and thank God, I have written no novels. Let this be included in my epitaph: "For all the evil that he wrought, and all the evil that he was, let Heaven nevertheless be reminded that in all his wretched miscarriage of a life, at least he wrote no novels." For all the mistakes I have made in my wholly mistaken existence, let it at least be marked to my credit that I have not committed the worst error of which any thinking (or unthinking) man is capable.

What, really, has this life of mine come to? I am old in my youth, and by becoming old, I have yet not shown cause to be venerable. So early—already such a waste—such a pity—such an unpardonable crime of a life, of a man, of a mind! Such a disgrace! Such a failure! There never was a use for me. (April 6, 2005)

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#### OF GOTHS.

It's half past ten on a Wednesday morning, and I'm still trying to discover the ultimate, practical essence of Gothicism, listening to the Damned album, *Phantasmagoria*. If this had been my introduction to "Gothic" music, I never would have developed the slightest curiosity regarding Gothicism; I would have let it rot. *Phantasmagoria* is a silly collection of jovial, inconsequential, and hopelessly muddled pop-rock songs—with smatterings of an organ. But the cover art is, at

least, very Gothic (a sullen-faced beauty, black robed, in a moon-doused graveyard), and the singer, Dave Vanian, is dressed up in the mode of a Hollywood Dracula. Though I hate it, it expresses the full and impartial truth of Gothicism: that it is—being a social formula—a formula for fun, good humor, and light-hearted self-parody. It is a method by which depressed and dark-minded persons may lighten their burdens upon the world by superficializing them. Gothicism is not, therefore, and cannot be serious. Like a black mass celebrated by housewives maddened by toil and tedium, Gothicism is an externally morose method of relieving ourselves from the quest for happiness, and exploring the bleaker regions of our subjective realities; not alone, but in the company of an entire clique—an army of similarly inclined seekers. Put simply, there would be no Goths if Gothicism

were not already a widespread and ubiquitously recognized cultural phenomenon. Gothicism, unlikely as it sounds, originated with no single personality, and among its legions, contains no originals. It is, to make use of a wretched pun, both *scene* and *herd*.

In light (or darkness) of this fact, one may not join the company of Goths in order that he may impress them with either his practiced or inborn somberness of character. As in all other cliques, he will find himself ignored. However Goths may appear, their circles still function within the conventions of any other social group: they are ruled by the most charismatic, affable, and physically appealing members. Solemnity, as always, acquires only the loyalty of the pious, and Gothicism has never contained piety within its informal bank of endlessly contested creeds. The only true Goth is a party Goth, accepted in his circles, encouraged to

increasing levels of outward ostentation, and continuously replenished at the fount of his beloved scene, which, if he persists for long enough (in these matters, only a few years) will slowly come to adopt him as its gravitational center. For as the originals fall away, the neophytes by which they are replaced will regard him as the leader, the master of ceremonies, the arbiter of all Gothic matters. His opinion will be made truth; his example will be mimicked; his name will be used as a mode of advancement by the ambitious—for a while.

But everything has its era—its season in which to flourish and its season in which to decline. Gothicism, by now, has gone through a few of these cycles, and with each, it has changed, so that it has become difficult to recognize for those with whom it had its beginning. The elders, once venerated and enthroned amidst the festivities, will be forced to the shadows of by the

mocking eyes of the upstarts, by whom they are not recognized, and among whom they have no place. This is the way of every social entity, from churches, to officers' clubs, to political parties, to cliques like Gothicism, formed from music, fashion, and existential boredom. There is nothing that is "right." There is only that which is new and that which is old. Time shows deference to nothing and no one. May we know the good times while they are with us, for they will soon be over, and we shall bear their remnants like the stigmas of a disfiguring disease. We will be cast out as infected and obsolete. For our good humor in the past, we shall be looked upon with evil humor in the present; our rituals desecrated—our icons ridiculed—our hymns reduced to the level of misinterpreted arcana. (April 11, 2005)

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ENNUI.

How often has one heard himself say that he is "bored to death?" Well, I, for one, have never said it; in any case, not since my childhood. I am a creative being. God speaks to me in whispers, and when I am doing nothing else, I am listening. For God is never silent, and therefore, I am never bored. But I am nevertheless near to death. Nearer than boredom can take one. My thoughts wheel and race like squirrels about a tree, and I am never free from their twittering and scratching. O God—let me once know boredom, or let me at last know death!

No, what I know is not boredom—for I am always thinking. But I suffer every moment with the knowledge that my thoughts are useless; further, that they are the very progenitors of my unhappiness! For there is no action which I can take, which my thoughts will not condemn. There is no purpose I can find, which my thoughts will not decry as mistaken and



futile. By my thoughts, all beauty is censored; all hope is exiled; all affinity made sour; all gaiety made putrid. By my thoughts am I set opposite to man and nature, finding no companion on the street, or in the wood, nor even in my home. My thoughts are a bitter oil upon my skin and a baneful odor upon my breath; they mark me and ensure that love maintains its distance.

For it is true that when my ears incline to laughter, I am sickened, and when to lamentation, I am much relieved and gratified, and it is in the midst of mourning that I furtively must smile. Even in my own grief am I singularly at peace. If the world were not so filled with death, I doubt whether I could find the will to live.

It is only by the contemplation of my own death that I am, day by day, sustained. But when, by mishap, my thoughts fall upon living, I falter, I fail, and feeling myself hung upon by the insistent arms of sleep, I

retreat, resolving to wake nevermore.

And they scoff that hear me say I am cursed!  
(April 16, 2005)

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#### THE DANDY.

It was dark outside, and with a light shining behind him, his window acted as a mirror, in which his image was made flattering by the propitious alliance of shadow and illumination. He shifted slowly in one direction, then another, searching for the precise point in space at which his features were best represented; neither blotted out by darkness nor entirely awash in light. He placed his elbow on the windowsill and set his chin softly upon the round back of his softly arched hand. His fingers were long and white as Grecian marble. He fixed his eyes upon those of his reflection, and, as a final measure, he carefully knocked a strand of hair away from his scalp, so that it came to rest just to

the side of one eye, curling precisely at the knob of his cheek.

And for the longest time, he sat, perfectly still, not daring even to scratch his earlobe—waiting for someone—it mattered not whom—to look at him from the street below, and to think the thought transmitted from God, that there—up in that window—sits a thing of uncommon beauty.

For there is nothing in this world so sublime as to be admired, and one who has been admired need never to wonder at his being. And one who has never been admired, need never to have been at all.

So it is that all in life is vanity, except for vanity itself, which is the pursuit of the gods. (April 17, 2005)

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#### HOMILY.

How did Jesus redeem? In essence, it was through crucifying himself. He understood the processes and propensities of the

world and its rulers, and intentionally set out to be irksome to them. Jesus' death was not a sacrifice: it was a suicide.

The early church appeared to understand this, and it is unfortunate that such wonderful institutions as self-flagellation and voluntary martyrdom are now considered archaic. They were, perhaps, the apex of religious understanding.

The factual brunt of Jesus' teaching is that one should make oneself intolerable to the humanity around one. Life is a torment: Jesus taught this. Understand that the world exists to cause you misery and you'll be better off. To struggle against the chains is to cause them to dig deeper. Such maxims as "turn the other cheek" and "blessed are they that mourn" are obviously intended for persons occupying a world of restless, arbitrary punishments.

In this world, if one is not undergoing physical torments, he is instead undergoing mental

torments. If he escapes torment, it is because his fellowman is being tormented in his place, and this only means that his own turn is soon to come. We are doomed to watch the torments of those around us, which makes our own anticipation of torment all the more terrible. The world is a vast torture chamber; if we ourselves are silent, it is so that we may listen to the screams of others. And we are set upon one another with implements of torture, believing that if we make ourselves useful to the universal scheme of torment, we can be made exempt from its scourges.

Do not submit to the temptation to join the tormenters. The flail you hold must be for yourself. Torment yourself and the tormenters are defied. God is indeed a jealous god. His only concern is that he be the originator of your misery. Your only recourse is to render his torments null by creating your own. God has no authority over those who do not seek happiness,

relief, or mercy, for such persons are beyond tormenting. They have solved the riddle—perceived the truth behind the illusion. When life gives you misery, you must say, “Of course, or it would not be life.” Torment yourself in the midst of happiness, and you will be unaffected by the torments prepared for you in the wake of your well-being. Torment yourself in times of despair, and you will frustrate the orchestrations of the despicable Creator, and be saved. Only in self-abuse and self-contempt are we made free. And why should we not despise ourselves and our lives? Are we not the playthings of a bloody-minded and cruel Creator? The world and all creation is to be condemned! Life is continuous, unabated suffering—whether it be plain or concealed, our suffering is constant. Suffering is from the Creator God, and it is the one pleasure which we are able to take from Him. Punish yourself

constantly, grieve without  
pause, for hope and  
happiness are the traps  
we must escape—they are  
the bonds against which  
we must struggle. Refuse  
joy! Embrace sorrow!  
There lies your salvation!

Nature is  
abominable; flesh is  
hateful. We are tricked by  
the promise of love and  
the fallacy of beauty; by  
these are we cast into the  
hands of our tormentor.  
See creation as it truly is:  
a dungeon, a pit, a  
playground of horrors. It  
is the evil work of a  
contemptible demiurge,  
our maker, our enemy.  
He formed our bodies—  
but he must not possess  
our souls! Despise your  
body for the sake of your  
soul; this is the entreaty  
of Knowers and Truth-  
seers throughout all the  
ages. The Creator cares  
nothing for you—only that  
you suffer in such a  
manner as he devises.  
There is no true pleasure;  
it is a myth by which men  
have been ensnared since  
time immemorial.  
Therefore, take your  
pleasure in self-torment,  
and reduce the pleasure of

your Enemy. The  
demiurge cannot claim a  
soul which has released  
itself from the bonds of  
creation. (April 17, 2005)

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A LIAR CONVERSES  
WITH HIMSELF

Sorry. I just stepped out  
for a cigarette.

*A cigarette? Don't you  
smoke a pipe?*

I alternate. Today I  
thought I'd give the mouth  
cancer a rest and let lung  
cancer have a chance. My  
teeth have the worst of it,  
either way. I'm certainly  
not looking forward to  
seeing them turn yellow.

*So why don't you stop  
smoking altogether?*

If I didn't smoke, what  
*would* I do? Start cutting  
again? There's nothing  
spontaneous about  
suicide, friend. It takes a  
lifetime of thinking, a  
lifetime of minute,  
dawdling little steps.  
Maybe when I get cancer,  
I'll slit my wrists to spare

myself unnecessary pain.  
Or maybe I'll just die of  
the cancer, and gratify  
myself with the knowledge  
that it's something I  
wanted—something I  
worked for—something I  
counted on.

*What are you writing  
about?*

Something idiotic.  
Character descriptions for  
characters I'll never use.  
It's pointless anyhow. All  
my characters are the  
same, as are all of my plot  
ideas. You know—I  
realized something out  
there, as I was smoking  
that cigarette....

*What did you realize?*

I realized that I hate  
narratives. I hate writing  
them and I hate reading  
them.

*How can you hate  
narratives? There's no  
writing without  
narratives—short of  
straight dialogue...*

Dialogue's fine. I like  
dialogue.

*But what about  
descriptions? How can  
you create a visible,  
tangible world in writing  
without describing that  
world through narrative?*

Why describe the world?  
Why make it that easy?  
The reader sees precisely  
as much as I want him to  
see. It's my world, not the  
reader's. Allow me to  
demonstrate my  
reasoning.

Some time ago, I  
was trying to write a novel  
about a character that  
existed in a realm of  
empty space—an absolute  
void. He was, in essence,  
the prince of Nothing.  
After a few pages of  
writing, however, I could  
go no further. The powers  
of narrative were  
insufficient to convey the  
totality of the nothingness  
in which my character  
lived. The narrative  
demanded description,  
but there was nothing to  
describe; it demanded  
that circumstances be  
placed within the passage  
of time—but there was no  
time, and the only  
circumstances were the  
inner considerations of my

character, whose only focus and only stimulus was himself. Having mistakenly begun with narrative, I was quickly forced to abandon the story.

*But it sounds as if there was no story.*

But there was. It was a story of complete isolation on an unchanging, formless plane of negative space. It was a story without transitions.

*So you have discounted the narrative merely because you did not find it suited to the task of describing nothing, for indeed, there was nothing to be described. What if you were not writing about nothing, however? What if you were writing about something—something palpable and subject to the laws of time and physical space? Wouldn't you then require the use of narrative to ensure that the reader understood your purpose?*

Only if that purpose was to bring the reader into a world with which they are

already familiar. But if they are familiar with our world already, is not the describing of it superfluous?

*But the author's purpose is to cause the reader to understand the world as he, the author, understands it, not necessarily as it is already understood by the reader. All art is the projection of a subjective state, is it not?*

The human experience is not so abstract as you imagine it. Even in the over-exploited realm of metaphor, a writer relies on the supposition that his reader is familiar with those objects and concepts which form the basis of his analogy. Let us consider such a statement as, "Her eyes were bright as suns." This statement naturally requires that the reader is familiar with the brightness of the sun. But what else does it mean?

*Obviously, that the narrator is enamored of the subject's eyes.*

But is not the sun painful and searing to look upon? Thus, is it not being said that to look into the subject's eyes causes the narrator some measure of agony?

*Arguably, yes. But this is the prerogative of poetic license: exaggeration for the sake of emphasis, and for the sake of simplicity.*

But what if the author's point was not one of simplicity? Could he not have meant that, though he was attracted by the brightness of the subject's eyes, something in them, or something in his attraction to them, was agonizing? How would he ensure that the reader understood this second layer of meaning? Would he not have to follow the first statement with one in which it was made perfectly plain that his purpose was not solely to praise the subject's eyes, but, in fact, to lament that they were too bright to look into? For, if they were not, why should he have not likened them to

moons, or sapphires, or anything else that is bright without being painfully so?

*My guess is that the narrator meant to describe awe rather than simple admiration. One admires the moon and is dazzled by sapphires, but one is awed by the brightness of the sun. If the reader understands this much, the statement requires no further qualification.*

In other words, nothing more is needed. The narrator need narrate no further.

*He may at least leave the matter of the subject's eyes alone.*

Good. But what author do you know who would express the whole of his point with, "Her eyes were bright as suns?" Would not any common writer see the need to continue endlessly, explaining and re-explaining, over and over exalting the brightness of her eyes? And having already likened her eyes to the

brightest object any man can imagine, would not the author finally succeed in muddling the reader's perception of his subject's eyes, so that they are no longer so bright as he first announced them to be? This is the hateful truth of the narrative: though we all understand our world, the narrative must almost invariably burden that understanding with irrelevancies, and bury it beneath a deluge of oppressive nuances. We are as oppressed by details in our fictions as we are in our actual lives. We are surrounded by books, three hundred pages long, filled with punctiliously-described little details, yet revealing nothing to us that we do not already quite intuitively understand....

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#### MY MUSE & MYSELF

My muse sits with one leg folded over another, a gun pointed at me. She threatens not to kill me, so I write.

Shall I describe my muse to you? I learned her name some years ago: it is Disappointment. She appears as a sickly and starving imitation of the Devourer, Kali, with the heads of her two prize victims dangling from her belt; they are Lady Wisdom and Lady Philosophy, and my muse is their assassin.

She is poorly dressed; a ruffled brummagem. My muse has no style. She is weak upon her legs—suffering only a few wobbling steps at a time. I come upon her, and she is sleeping, and will for nothing be awakened. She comes upon me, and I am made ill by her cadaverous effluence. I write only so that she will go away.

We hate each other. We are fixed, like two lunatics, upon a mounting game of reciprocated injuries. She scars me, and I write, and my writing is a scar upon us both.

Her day is done! She urges me toward death, then pits the last of her feeble powers upon



depriving me of it. She causes me to scribble worthless banalities from morning till eventide. I emerge from the ordeal, despising all that I have written, gripped by a hunger that nothing will satisfy, wanting for no rest so shallow that I may yet rise from it.

Two worthless scraps, purposely omitted from God's perfect design, we were placed together to assure one-another's obliteration. Even God could not have known that our natures would be so contrary, and so disastrously alike. Even the all-knowing God could not anticipate a hatred so strong as mine for my muse. (April 24, 2005)

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LYRIC

I am the poetic embodiment of  
"Nothing left to say."  
In words, it is for me to express  
That nothing may be expressed in words.  
I work in silence  
And silent is my work.

It is a failing work,  
And these are failing times,  
And in this work,  
And in these times,  
I am failed.

Five hundred persons  
were killed last week  
By martyrs for whom  
words were more sacred  
Than lives.

Their words may be,  
But *mine* are not,

And my life is no more  
sacred  
Than any of the five  
hundred.

O God,  
O God,  
O God,  
Why do you allow me to  
live?  
You'd kill your son,  
But you won't kill me;  
I, who have never once  
asked for God's mercy.

(April 24, 2005)

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LYRIC

You may open this book

And look for new  
thoughts,  
And shrewd thoughts,  
And old thoughts written  
by young hands  
On new paper.

You may open this book  
And think that you have  
found something,  
But you have not.

You're still not found,  
And neither am I.

And age may as well have  
authority around here,  
But youth demands  
attention—  
So who's leading the  
charge?  
Who's leading the  
revolution?  
Who's leading the retreat?

And I may be at the top of  
the grave,  
But I'm working my way  
slowly to the bottom,  
Where the real corpses  
are.

I want to be with them,  
With the fragrant  
skeletons.

(April 24, 2005)

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## LYRIC

O Ancients—  
Thank you for your  
example.  
I'm sorry I'm too soft to  
follow it.

O Ancients—  
Thank you for your  
technique.  
I'm sorry, I'm too stupid  
And too licentious  
To imitate.

O Ancients—  
Accept this, my ode,  
Which is only my apology.

For I am reprobate,  
And I am disconsolate,  
And immured as I am in  
this despair,  
My mind is in no state  
For the writing of odes.

My grandparents saw five  
wars,  
Economic collapse,  
Failed ventures,  
Abandoned careers,  
Empty tables,  
And empty conversations,  
And all are happier than I.

I have my health,  
But I don't want it.  
The end is near, they say,

But I can't see it.

O Ancients—  
Were your lives as long—  
As long and full of ire  
As mine promises to be?

I don't understand. I  
don't understand.  
I don't understand. I  
don't understand.  
I don't understand. I  
don't understand.  
I don't understand. I  
don't understand.  
I don't understand. I  
don't understand.

I've tried,  
But I don't understand.

As my daughter likes to  
say:  
"I don't know again."

(April 24, 2005)

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#### ON MELODY.

It seems to me that, in  
music, melody is the  
vehicle of the soul, while  
rhythm is the vehicle of  
the passions. This may be  
held to account for today's

popular music appealing  
more to the passions to  
the virtues. The modern  
person hardly seems to  
recognize a piece of music  
which contains no audible  
devices for the creation  
and marking of rhythm.  
Because, in the music, he  
is seeking a vehicle for his  
passions, his ear attends  
upon the rhythm, while  
his soul nevertheless  
harkens to the melody.  
Thus, a piece of music in  
which there is no obvious  
rhythm may immediately  
be accused of lacking  
passion. Passion is, in  
these times, misconstrued  
as its own form of virtue;  
therefore no man wishes  
to be called dispassionate.  
Philosophy, for this  
reason, is a null subject,  
while music—once a mode  
of transcendence—has  
come to occupy wholly the  
realm of carnality.

It ought, therefore,  
to be my conclusion as a  
musician that, if I wish  
not to descend to the  
service of the passions,  
even though my music  
intrinsically possesses a  
central rhythm, I ought  
not to accentuate this  
rhythm with the use of

percussion. I should, with my melodies, make it my object to appeal to the virtues—even if, in so-doing, I am denying myself an audience among the subjects of incontinence and cupidity.

It is best, moreover, that I do not seek fame. It is best that I continue my work quietly, leaving it behind me as my intellectual estate, no longer able to be contravened by the circumstances of my terrestrial existence. As a living celebrity, I would only be a source of confusion and discontent for my admirers. Only in death may perfect clarity be achieved—if not for me, then at least for those who would look to me for some measure of truth. As a man of flesh, I am not fit to teach.

It is best that I stay quiet. (April 27, 2005)

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#### LYRIC

I swear I'm not  
pretending—  
My heart is truly broken.

And though your hope  
was to restore it,  
You have in truth reduced  
its fragments  
To such a smallness that  
she who gathers them  
Must sacrifice her hand  
To shards without  
number,  
Which will remain with  
her forever,  
And with them, slice and  
rend the face of him  
Who, thereafter, she may  
love—  
Seeking in him those  
passions  
Which, in my order, she  
had been required to  
renounce.  
Though I claimed to be  
The patron of such  
passions,  
What I meant was,  
“I alone hold the  
prerogative  
Of following them as a  
shepherd's staff,  
Of tracing them to their  
crooked crown.”  
It is a right that I still  
claim,  
Here in the rubble of my  
convent,  
Saying, “You senseless  
harlot!  
Can you not see that my  
stigmata

Were bestowed so your  
devotion  
Could be seen by all as  
complete and absolute?  
O God! Thou hast filled  
my path with serpents  
And led me to the  
company of whores!  
My religion is corrupted—  
My temples are  
abandoned—  
And my sisters have taken  
into themselves  
The seeds of the children  
of the dirt!”

(April 30, 2005)

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#### SUICIDE NOTE

Seneca embraced his wife  
And then did this....

Why is it so hard? I must  
approach this  
philosophically.  
I am not suited to this  
struggle.  
The wind need not blow at  
me so;  
I am already fallen.

This is good.

I can die with this before  
me.

I love you, Dot. I  
hope you know that

We could never  
have been complete.

We're both used,  
you see. I, I in particular,

Am past all  
usefulness;

And you....

You are  
accustomed to  
continuation.

Perhaps I will be  
worth a written

Word or two, as  
*they* were before me.

But I anticipate  
that I am not.

I anticipate that I  
am not.

Look! I am nearer to the  
vein....

If there is nothing beyond  
this, I will be glad.

I will be glad to be  
beyond the reach of pain.

Dorothy!

Where are you? It is past  
midnight.

(Undated)

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#### ELEGY.

This is what history ought to know of me: I was born—I was born—I was born into a world every bit as repugnant and inhospitable as that which its future occupants will inhabit; I grew to love beauty, but I found it an unfaithful lover; I grew to hate myself intensely and entirely, and in self-hatred—nothing but self-hatred—was I constant. For my love of beauty made me faithless. I wanted to be beautiful, and in this, as in all things, did I fail.

How do I feel? I feel that I am, among all souls, furthest from the truth. I am accused falsely of possessing understanding. For all that I see, I see only mystery—vistas of torment—impassible fields of thorns surrounding me in every direction. And swallowed up by these thorns are crosses and white steeples, temples and idols, statues and monuments, glimmering memorials, and everything desirable to me. I see that I cannot even own my death, and that after my

death, all that I was will be owned—and discarded—by the living.

Shall I live for the dead? Shall I live and act in such an attitude as would do the dead honor? And is it doing the dead honor to live as if there is more worth in life than in death? Shall I taunt the dead by worshiping life?

This is what history ought to know of me: I was born, but I sought out death, and those who admire me most will say that I never lived, and that the dead took me as their own even while I breathed. They will say that I am present, in part, in every grave, and they will build shrines to me wherever death has landed. And they will send their daughters weeping to their marriage beds.

(June 7, 2005)

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#### THE SPIRITS.

My bedroom, when I lived in the house on Hurley Avenue between my fourteenth and

seventeenth years, was little more than a passageway—a through-chamber of sorts, connecting the attic door to the hallway. I took the little room as my own, leaving the much larger rooms for my siblings, first, because I did not wish to contend with them for a more desirable space, and second, because I have always been happy within small enclosures—more so than in vast openings. It did not occur to me for some time that what I inhabited, although it was small, was actually a crossroads—not only between two levels of the old house, but between two separate (yet not wholly distinct) planes: that of the living and that of the departed.

It became a fact of small solace and considerable wonder for me that, for reasons which I have not yet entirely penetrated, the dead—or, at least, many of the dead—are respecters of doors. I remember, on a great many occasions, being

literally pursued up the spirit-infested stairwell, slipping into my room—which was immediately to the right of the head of the stairs—and being saved by the hasty slamming of my door. Then I would stand, braced against the door, feeling the chill that accompanied my pursuer seep, frustrated, back down to the landing.

It was there, in the angle of the stairwell, that the spirits seemed to stand sentinel—gravitating, clearly, to the intersecting nature of the place. There was a window just there, and some nights the spirits would congregate in droves before it, thickening the air with their presences and barring my descent altogether. On nights like these I would have to dash past the stairs to the bathroom, my eyes shut tight, my heart tumbling like a loose milk jug in the back of a carriage. I knew that if I looked in their direction, their attentions would be diverted from the window to me, and that I would emerge from

the bathroom to find them lined up in the hall, sniffing at the doorway. They'd suffocate me with the aroma of the grave before I could reach my room again, clutching at my body, ravenous for the premature extraction of my terrified soul.

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#### NOCTURNE.

I'm back at my desk; the baby's in bed. I've a full glass of wine, light from a dusty lamp, and music playing. Everything is right, and I feel like filling a page.

But what does this change? I still have nothing to say. I would tell you a story, but I'm not worthy to give you a moral. Shall I be a voice for my generation? Sir, my generation has spoken, and I was silent. If ever my voice is heard, it shall not be counted among those of my generation. An echo they shall call me, an atavist perhaps, but never a reflection of my peers, and certainly not a prophet.

There is nearly no part of this world into which I was born, which it could be said that I love. I have chosen nothing in this world, taken nothing from it unto myself. I am a sulking shadow of implacable woe.

It cannot be that I was meant for another time. It can only be that I was meant for this time, and I was meant to be unhappy. It can only be that I was placed here to be displaced.

But think how lucky I am! For, placed beside the glories and prodigies of they that have passed into history, would I not be found pale and inadequate? But, residing as I do in this era, though I am mediocre, I may yet be called uncommon. Uncommon, only, to the extent of being unappreciable, incomprehensible, and irrelevant. But so it must be. One can't have everything.

Some day I shall succeed in writing something perfectly ridiculous, and by this catch the world's attention



earn its admiration, and be forever thereafter identified with the imbeciles that paid me credence during my mind's idlest hour. And it will be the work of scholars, centuries from now, to redeem my name—to raise it, if they can, from where it has sunk—and with whom.

But in the end, my mightiest defenders will be they against which I would beg defense.

Now—to get drunk and to scheme toward that dullest, that worst of all works. Now, to my destiny!

Oh, how failure binds me! (June 18, 2005)

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#### THE PARABLE OF THE IDOLS.

A man once asked his priest: “Father, why do we venerate idols?”

The priest answered, saying, “It is because the spirits of our gods inhabit the bodies of our idols.”

So the man went and smashed all of the idols. The gods, having no more bodies, escaped to heaven, and the man was left with no more gods, and no more idols.

The wise read this parable as a tragedy, the impudent as a comedy, the innocent as a prophecy, the learned as history, and the experienced as biography.

(June 24, 2005)

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#### “TRUTHS DESERVING EXPRESSION.”

There exists in me, and operates in me, a measure of both my Father and my Mother (the former being Intellect and the latter being Nature.) I am impelled to follow the urgings of both my body and my mind, and if followed to their respective sources, both may be found to serve different and even opposite ends. My body moves with the directives and impulses with which all Nature moves: to devour, to

create, to be satisfied, to rest, to hunt and to escape my enemies. I am still, physically, a youth, and my body still pays its obedience to the Mother that formed it.

My mind, however, is slowly coming to recognize its separate origin, and with my mind, I have begun to quest for the Father of Mind. Thought is encompassed by a world of forms, and it must rely on perception and interpretation of forms to navigate and negotiate its way towards Intellectual realization.

The presence of life does not pre-necessitate the presence of Mind, any more than the laying of an egg require that the egg be fertilized. Where Mind is not, nature exists peacefully of its own accord; where Mind is introduced (and it is only introduced in man), Nature and Mind will come into conflict, and the one will seek to overcome the other. One is not good, nor the other evil. They are merely different, and it is this difference

which is perceived [or construed], in humans and their civilizations, as good and evil. All humans are in conflict, and the man that has not the means to pursue harmony will be forever at war. We must make the best of the experiment and seek, despite the collisions within us, to be at peace. Mind and Nature, like husband and wife, must endeavor to exist, as much as possible, free of quarrel, free of intrigue, free of selfishness, and free of deceit.

The Mind injected me with Spirit so that, within the trials and embattlements of flesh, Spirit might be perfected. This could not have been done without reason. By refusing to perfect ourselves, we fail our Father and do injury to our Mother. Man is a volatile potion; he must work to calm himself. That which comes first to man is conflict, but he who has condemned himself to conflict and engaged in it as his defining pursuit, has only

proved that he is unworthy to contain the combined attributes of Father and Mother, Intellect and Nature.

All that is wicked in our society is defined by consumption, and it is so because the very great majority of us are consumed by our internal tempests, and thus weakened, cannot withstand the externalization of the conflicts within others. But ultimately, we must all fight out battles (or rather, subdue our combatants) alone. Conquering ourselves, we must only then instruct those yet embroiled in the methods to be employed in their self-conquering, in their quashing of their own internal rebellions. Our fight is never with governments, never with institutions, never with other men. Our fight is with the very instinct that tells us that we *must* fight. Our cause is not to make war but to be at peace. Only when we cease to be consumed will we see the

individual and artificial nature of consumption.

I have found my enemy and have resolvedly set about to rout him. My enemy is Conflict, inner turmoil, restlessness, dissatisfaction, disappointment, unmitigated passion, indecision, vacillation, discontentedness, unbalanced acquiescence to pride and self adoration and self-abhorrence and self-deception, and a ruinous impulse to condemn those things which need changing while refusing to exorcise myself of their ambassadors, which inhabit me, gnaw at my conscience, and distract me with a self-perpetuating and victorless struggle. This struggle, indeed, is my only true enemy.

My weapons against him are these: calmness, quietude, a philosophical perspective, a continuously-improved understanding of the ineffable truths that lie, immovable as sphinxes,

behind the mesmerizing façade of the moment and the age, a righteous detestation of the human inclination toward conflict, and a fathomless compassion for those who suffer under it, including myself—for the cure is continuous, and the treatment never concluded. Benevolence, thoughtfulness, philosophy, and the pursuit of understanding are the only balms to soothe the ruptures and boils that mark the human condition, and that cause us to chafe against ourselves, clash with each other, and set our rage against the temporal world.

And in this world, who is well? Can the physician that siphons the wealth and the peace-of-mind from his patient be called well? Can the patient that seeks to repair his physical health while descending into bankruptcy and inner tumult be called well? Can the wealthy that prowl for billions and the poor that grapple for pennies be called well?

Can the harried, poison-breathing urbanite be called well? Can the isolated, uncultured, rural outcast from the civilized world be called well?

A company works its way to wealth, becomes large enough to employ tens of thousands, finds that it is being surpassed by another company, and tries to recoup its monetary prestige by placing its name and fortune in the hands of whoever is rich enough to buy a portion, retracts its benefices from thousands of the employees who had staked their lives on them, sending fathers and mothers home jobless to extend empty palms toward their selfish and materialistically-corrupted children and spouses, who all must eventually fall ill, and therefore go to doctors who exact an impossible payment, and, claiming to make them well, demand that they again place themselves in the hands of an unsympathetic company that works them half to death, pays them not

enough to eat, and sends them, panting at the brink of agonizing death, back to the doctors for another round of fleecing.

The dynamo—the impetus for this manner of life—is, of course, greed, which is born of jealousy, which is descended from lust, which originates with restlessness, discontentedness, and a hunger disproportionate to actual necessity. And all of this we owe to the blending of Nature and Intellect, which placed the appetites of gods within the stomachs and loins of mere animals. So everyone seeks to hold the position of a deity while living, physically, as a beast lives—surrounded by things that beasts desire, dressed in garments which, being partially divine, we understand to possess a nevertheless indefinable manner or approximation of beauty. We are puppet Olympians, with our movements articulated by apes.

Nature cannot save us from civilization, nor

can civilization rescue us from slavish nature. We must be natural and civilized; we must lay equal portions upon both altars. We must want nothing so much, and value nothing so much, as peace. Peace at the price of justice, peace at the price of wealth, peace at the price of pride, and peace at the price of passion.

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MY WIFE.

I must expect to possess my wife only in body, and expect that I have as much chance of experiencing a moment of spiritual attunement or unity with her, as I do with any other person. If this chance is increased with my wife, it is only because she and I are together oftener than we are with others. But the concerns we share are more often mundane, and less often philosophical, and therefore less likely to bear mutually-experienced philosophical fruits. We have been joined for the

enhancement of one-another's physical worlds, and by making the physical world more tolerable, we cause each other to be more available to its underlying spiritual lessons. The combination of our natures is symbolic of and relevant to the contrasting instinctive and intellectual natures of all persons.

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#### FRAGMENTS.

I've spent my whole day reading about philosophers—about their books and the writing of their books; numbers of pages, numbers of years, numbers of sales—persistence and patience—the gaining and losing of fame. I should have taken Schopenhauer's warning when he first gave it to me: I have read too much, and I don't know what to think. I'm beginning to believe that I don't know *how* to think. I only know that there is no philosopher yet with whom I wholly agree or

wholly disagree. But am I deserving of an opinion? And am I worthy to call my opinion *philosophy*?

Or am I merely a reader of books?

\* \* \*

Standing (or so I thought) at the brink of new and ancient knowledge, I have fallen again into my old ways: a confounder, a seducer, a soothsayer, a mountebank. And I have turned my fangs, as ever before, upon a young girl. And she loves me. And I have told her that I love her. And I am not yet so reformed as to spit her out, though I be found with her dangling from my maw—though my crime—my calumny—my cannibalism be discovered, and my life brought to ruin! What manner of philosopher is this, who takes two wives and wastes his words on silly, moonstruck innocents? When, I beg to know, shall I be free of *youth*?

\* \* \*

I must admit, then, that it is still my goal not to write a philosophy, but to write a gospel. My mind is too weak and too changeable to stand before the calculating dissection of scholars. I have not the strength to climb the stairs to academia. I must, like all weak men, assume the fallacious auspices of divinity, and being uninspired, must implore the inspiration of the gods.

\* \* \*

How much can I afford not to understand? For all my study, my continuous—and seemingly growing—ignorance is inexcusable. I have mastered no languages, no arts, no sciences, no systems of illumination or adumbration. I have not mastered myself enough to abate my desire to be the master of others. How much must I read and forget before I am called wise? How much must I write before I am called noteworthy? How much must I lie before I am

called a revelator of truths?

\* \* \*

Music and I have failed each other. I do not suppose that we shall be found again in the same company. We were, I think, unsuitable and too tempestuous lovers. But I will miss her, and ever will I regret that I was not worthy to do her greater service.

(June 29, 2005)

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#### ON MARRIAGE.

Marriage in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a useless, crippled institution—almost completely superfluous, and sufficing in essentially none of the functions for which society originally intended it. Marriage is considered by many to be a religious observation, and is therefore as meaningless and empty as the mimed devotions of nearly every religion still extant in the United States. Marriage is

a memory of something once vital, now obsolete, but still reenacted in the same manner as a fireworks display is meant to reenact the War of 1812. A wedding is a fairy-tale moment in the midst of a ceaselessly tragic and turbulent reality; it is the dizzying climb preceding a suicide-leap into horrific disillusionment. A wedding is a futile act of infantile and inexcusable denial—a petulant rebellion against an inescapable truth. Marriage should be banned for the protection of the young; for the older generations, it should be treated as a harmful addiction. Marriage counselors should wear government identifications.

Having thus posited my frank and honest opinion on the matter, I ought now to confess that I am on the verge of my 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday, have been married twice, and am married still. And I must beg to be forgiven.

Here is a description of the world

into which the Fates have deposited your unfortunate author. Society, having found itself still embroiled in a reactionary struggle against everything which once sought to coax, coral, or hustle it into a state of outward decency, has sanctified the influences of such voices as Freud, Russell, and Dr. Ruth, and resigned every effort to avoid the fact that, on a natural, instinctive level, our every impulse is either directly sexual, or at least partially affected by our sexual urge. Thus, there is nothing that society undertakes which is free of sexual motivations, inspiration, expectation, connotation, or capitulation. Anything interesting or attractive is now referred to as “sexy,” from automobiles to trust funds to coffee blends. In contrast to previous centuries, in which one was obliged to go out looking for lascivious images and activities, today they come looking for you; not only in the form of prostitution and pornography, but in the



form of advertising, in the form of fashion, in the form of literature, culture, and conversation. There are, today, only two relevant axioms to be observed by all with an eye for success: sex sells, and everything is for sale.

The accession of sexuality has been purchased at the abdication of Romance, and being surfeited—practically choked—with the one, we have discovered how much we miss the other. But we go looking for Romance, and find only sex, and eventually assume that the former was only ever a dishonest subterfuge for the latter, which cultural evolution and social liberation has caused us to evolve beyond. These days, we're respectful enough to treat ourselves with honesty, even if it requires that we retire such much-loved notions as love coexisting beside innocence. We know what we really want, and as a courtesy to ourselves and to the new generations, we've made it impossible not to get it, in some form,

practically all the time. How very lucky we are.

How does this apply to the institution of marriage? To explain the irrelevance of marriage in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, let us begin by reviewing its relevance to the centuries preceding it.

#### Marriage

undoubtedly began within the first tribal family units with which humanity, emerging from its evolutionary genesis, initially began to roam the hostile globe and populate its various corners. It was, from the beginning, a practical institution, formed concurrently with the understanding that, owing to the distinct functions foisted upon the sexes by Nature, men and women would each have to accept a certain number of duties and responsibilities, conducted in the spirit of cooperation, to ensure the survival of the species. It was, from the beginning, the duty of the woman to bear and care for her offspring, and the duty of the man to supply them

with food, shelter, and security from external harm. These facts went quite unquestioned for, it seems, a remarkably long time.

As human populations grew steadily from their unknowable primeval source, and the single-family tribal units became, with the addition of successive generations, multiple-family units, the groups began to diverge. Some stayed one place, others among them preferred to move on, and in the midst of their migration, these encountered others. One group mingled with another, and a new generation was bred from their combined stocks, causing a link—biological and metaphysical—between the two units. It is in this primitive interchange that marriage, as a social-political concept, had its inception in the minds of the species.

Moving forward in pre-history, we see how marriage is applied to obtain alliances, favors, and the assurance of

peace between human tribes. Two groups converge upon the same territory, and to obviate violent competition, make an exchange of a few women—thereby joining the families and fostering a generational bond which only the passage of centuries will allow them to forget. The first human mates may very well have been joined by an inevitable mutual attraction, but the first marriage was without doubt a marriage of convenience. Marriage started, and for the longest time continued, as a means of pacification between two potential competitors. Put simply, the sexual urge was shrewdly employed by our remotest ancestors to temporarily subdue the selfish and aggressive urge. We made love so that we would not make war.

As time progressed and civilizations took shape, marriage remained practically unchanged. Two essential differences placed their everlasting brand upon the marriage,

however: the first being the evolution of cities within non-migratory, agrarian societies, and the second being the semi-formalized institution of religious practices.

The first of these effectively meant the conscious perpetuation of hierarchical orders—the preservation of bloodlines among the dominant or ruling classes as an effort to retain the balance of power, while regulating, to an extent, a consistent social structure dividing the aristocratic community from that of the servile classes. Here we have the origin of the “fairy-tale” marriage, in which an apparent peasant discovers she’s a princess after all, and is therefore qualified to share the crown and the nuptial bed of a prince. Such stories, however, have nothing in common with history.

The second modification, that of the new religious significance applied to marriage, may well predate the first. It is difficult—essentially impossible—to place our

proverbial finger on the point in which religion well and truly found itself established—in the form of shamans, witch-doctors, and yarn-spinning village elders—in humanity’s social constructs. We know, however, that once man realized himself to possess the religious inclination, religious ritual was given an indispensable place in every possible function of social and political life. So unlike our modern era, the world of our ancestors was, in nearly every place and nearly every time, a variegated mass of practical theocracies. Among the few traces of this fact which still remain in defiance of the Enlightenment, the discoveries of Darwin, and the advent of armchair agnosticism, are the Presidential inauguration ceremony, the motto in our courthouses, and the tradition of sacred vows and religious trappings being employed in the majority of weddings. . . .

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## HYMN

The weeping god—  
The divested god—  
The huddling and lonely  
god—  
The despairing god—  
The helpless god—  
The god whose mad  
creation  
Has dominated him  
And cast him out—  
The god whose children  
Have constructed for him  
A heaven of torments  
And a temple,  
Never lit,  
And never filled  
With song.

“Don’t ask me about  
nature,”  
Says this god;  
“She and I have no  
intercourse.  
But she is a beautiful  
horror,  
Is she not?”

(July 6, 2005)

---

## LYRIC

God save me!

I am a slave still to my  
passions—

A captive to the love of  
tears.

All of my studies are lost  
upon me.

I might have never opened  
a book,

Only to sit before a mirror,  
or a poem,

Or a photograph, and  
weep.

And all that I love in  
myself

Is my weakness.

I am my own loveliest  
woman—

My own dearest child.

I may hold myself until I  
die,

And be comforted by my  
own shuddering.

I am unworthy of my  
teachers.

I am a man

Overcome with Nature.

(July 6, 2005))

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## MEMORY.

Nothing is of any value  
until it has been  
reassessed in the realm of  
Memory. In memory,  
great sorrows are recalled  
with great pleasure, and  
great pleasures are  
recalled with deep sorrow.

The mature human being is a thing formed from regret; we repent for those things which pleased us as children.

(July 13, 2005)

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#### LITERATURE.

What—truly—makes the author of a work of “literature” superior to that of a super-market romance or paperback fantasy? Is it because one attempts to express things as they are, and the other, as he and his audience would like them to be? Shall we then call modern literature the craft of describing reality through fiction?

My guiding thought, if I am to create a work of literature, ought therefore to be that it is realistic, or else that it is so simple that it is taken not for fiction, but for allegory, which pertains to common experience.

(July 14, 2005)

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#### TO A DEPARTING ACQUAINTANCE.

Why weren't we better friends, I wonder? Didn't I know every Warren Zevon lyric you ever quoted? Didn't I disagree with you when the conversation seemed to withdraw into shuttered shyness? Didn't I spend three hours with your schizophrenic employer, while dinner got cold back over the river? Didn't I express vague interest in your inane ideas for novels? Didn't I help you to three large pinches of my tobacco? Didn't I promise to introduce you to my wife... eventually?

Oh, but I do know that the current runs irresistibly southward. That's why, first chance I get, I'm going north. I'm not going to miss out on another summer's snowfall. I'm going north, to the mammoth graveyard. I'm going north, to be born again in the Museum of Natural History, with a painted-on tan and a

chest full of horsehair.  
You can have your sunny  
Florida, your doomed  
Atlantis. I'm going north,  
where the bones stay knit  
together.

(July 25, 2005)

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THOUGHTS OF A DANDY.

I look at myself  
photographed now, and I  
am amazed that, for the  
first time, I no longer  
sense that I am looking at  
a stranger. I truly do see  
myself. I am heavy, I have  
weight, I have totality of  
being; I can hear the mind  
murmur from behind my  
loud yet untelling eyes—I  
can sense the  
hopelessness of my smile,  
which lasted a moment,  
and was recorded,  
deceptively, as an eternal  
truth. I am ugly, but I am  
real.

I was complaining to my  
wife last night that I have  
no photographs of  
myself—at least none  
taken by a second party—  
in which it is expressly  
intended that I appear

attractive. I have no  
reliable form of proof by  
which I may assure  
myself, despite my mood,  
that I am beautiful, and  
that others in the world  
automatically and  
involuntarily perceive me  
and react to me as a  
figure of beauty. I have  
only my own vanity, which  
is so often conquered by  
my self-abhorrence. But  
what I want is to be  
surrounded with  
photographs, and mobbed  
by persons wanting to  
take more photographs, so  
that at no point, and for  
no reason, may I ever  
again think of myself as  
ugly.

(August 14, 2005)

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ECSTASY.

I fell against the wall and  
pretended to be Jesus,  
thinking I was possessed  
by mocking spirits; on my  
knees, my head in my lap,  
I canted prayer after  
sobbing prayer to Hell.  
“Please,” I cried, “please,  
the Lord has forgotten to  
give me a purpose. This is

your chance. I'm  
overlooked, I'm  
uncounted, I'm in your  
hands—and I will do  
anything! Anything for  
the devil that calls himself  
my god!"

I smelled deeply the  
incense, attacking my  
arms and face relentlessly  
with the long, heavy blade  
of a kitchen knife. I drew  
profane and forbidden  
symbols in blood upon my  
skin; I made vows; I  
renounced my father and  
my mother—swore to kill  
them, if so bidden. I read  
arcane books; I listened to  
songs in which the name  
Satan was pronounced  
over and over. I regarded  
myself as devout.

Now I listen to these songs  
I have created. There is  
power in these songs—the  
power of invocation. By  
these, I could make the  
world grow atwitter with  
whispers. "He worships  
strange gods and reveres  
strange gospels," they  
might say, "But who are  
his gods, and what are  
these gospels, and who is  
he that sings of them?  
And what does he want

with us? And what does  
he want of our children?"

God in Heaven! I need a  
religion! Everyone needs  
a religion, but no one  
needs it more than I.

Or is it the mere desire for  
a religion that gives me  
such power?

(August 14, 2005)

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#### DRUNKEN SONG.

*Look! The sad and naked  
boy;  
He is my one and only joy;  
At once ashamed, and  
bold, and coy—  
My love! The sad and  
naked boy.  
My love—his tears fall fast  
and heavy;  
His shoulders slight,  
shaking, unsteady—  
His flesh of fragile, faint  
alloy;  
My love! This white and  
wanton boy.*

Unashamed, impelled and  
automatic—I continue  
with the Gospel by which I  
may be worshiped. For I  
was made that I might

find myself an object of  
worship, and reveal this  
much to my lovers, my  
mourners, my only  
friends. You see that I am  
without pride. You see  
this and therefore....

I want more than anything  
to reveal myself to you, my  
love, my lover, lovely. My  
love! Suffer me drunk and  
suffer me sober; suffer me  
gay and spritely, sour.  
Suffer me to your woman-  
parts. Suffer my boyhood;  
my manhood is ravished,  
squandered, imperiled am  
I. I love you.

Yes, I am drunker now,  
and the words have been  
cured of their  
timorousness. So what if  
I can only love you when  
I'm drunk? I like drink  
and you like love; such  
solutions are  
incontestable as they are  
incorruptible. Look! We  
have found ourselves in  
another book. The gods  
are wise; let us kiss....

(September 28, 2005)

---

DRUNKEN SONG  
CONTINUED.

I wasn't finished with you,  
though I said I was. I  
simply had yet to  
understand your  
boundaries, and where I  
could not take you. I  
ought to have been alone  
with you more. I ought to  
have made our sad and  
drunk moments together  
sacred. I wish that we did  
not now have such cause  
to fear, such cause to  
remain distant, such  
cause to be discreet, to be  
liars, to be failed and  
faint-hearted cowards.  
Our hearts are dashed  
upon distant-lying reefs,  
and they will never be  
salvaged.

(September 28, 2005)

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NARCISSUS.

I took my opportunity  
when she had gotten out  
of the car. Before she  
could close the door, I  
shifted into reverse and  
tore away; then I  
accelerated to a speed of  
sixty-odd miles per-hour,



and drove forward into a solid stone wall. The car folded in half and its rear wheels jumped three feet into the air, before bouncing back to earth amid a rain of glass and plastics. I heard her scream and was dead a moment later, my body crushed like a grape in a wine press. My last emotion was one of gratitude. *Thank you. I'm dead.*

I have thoughts like this all the time. Every time I get into a car, I begin imagining the ways in which I may make the journey to come the last of my life; my head fills with visions of colliding metal, bodies snapping and exhaling their souls, and spiraling towers of flame; terror and the unforgettable smell. I lust for no man and no woman any longer. I only lust for this. I am happy to spend my days weeping unheard and dreaming of death. And every man and every woman I pass by, or who passes by me, I would that I could restrain them, my hands firmly upon

their shoulders, and force them to watch the tears dashing out from the bottomless wells of my eyes; but I know that my grief is nothing to them, and it has no cause, and it has no meaning, and they would sooner perish than understand, and it seems that I would sooner go on grieving than perish, for I have not perished yet. And I should, sooner or later, I should.

I wonder, if I were a woman, if my torment would run so deeply, and go so long unappeased. What if I could weep upon impulse? Would I be always relieved? Would the world hurry forward to embrace me, to comfort me with recitations of denial and kind-hearted admonitions? Could I expect, from endless pain, to come endless reward? Would my sorrow bring ugliness, if I were a woman? For I feel it brings me beauty now; the only beauty I can claim. I am ugly, but my sorrow causes me to feel constantly beautiful, and constantly drawn to my

own image, my own form,  
my own irrefutable  
vacuum and void. If I  
were not inconsolable, I  
would not love myself so,  
no fill myself with such  
spasms and frenzies of  
irrepressible passion.

My passion. My sorrowful  
and inconsolable passion!

(September 28, 2005)

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LYRIC

Not my fault—  
Not my doing—  
But my undoing,  
And the result of all  
That has gone undone.

“I’m sorry it didn’t happen  
For you, kid.”

No, you’re not.  
And neither am I;  
For in this life,  
I have sorrows,  
And I have regrets,  
And I do my best  
To keep the two from  
mixing.

It’s a spook’s life,  
And it’s strange to be  
invisible,

But you know,  
“Unfinished business”  
Is the blood of life  
To me  
And all my kind.

(October 17, 2005)

---

THE INCARNATION.

The boy-god came, and  
nobody noticed except she  
who, seeing his body,  
said, “Come here, boy-  
god,”—but even she, his  
wife, knew him only as a  
boy in a boy’s god-like  
body, which she had seen  
suggested in ancient  
statues. So he remained a  
boy and never a god to  
anyone but himself, and  
even he sometimes  
doubted it—and naturally,  
this caused him to feel  
alone. For all his life he  
was terribly alone.

The boy-god knew  
that, from beginning to  
end (and now it appeared  
that there would be no  
end), he had done nearly  
everything wrong. All of  
the avatars say that there  
has been many avatars  
before them, and that

there will be many more after, but nevertheless one never hears of any but a few of these. These, the boy-god reasoned, must have been in some way failed or otherwise insignificant avatars. He must be one of these: an avatar of uncommonly little significance.

The boy-god never seemed to have the ease in initiating his conversations that most avatars have. No one ever came to him saying, "O Lord, please bless me," or "Master, instruct me." A few came to him saying, "Nice tie; what's the occasion?" But these were never looking for blessings or instructions, and the boy-god rarely tried to impart either. Rather, he said, "Thank you," which is, in any case, closer to a blessing than his more commonly employed, "I'm sorry."

A girl once came to the boy-god and immediately began weeping. "What's the matter?" the boy-god asked, very seriously and

concernedly. "Two of my best friends were just killed together in a car accident," the girl sobbed, and she held out a newspaper in which was printed a report of the crash. "I'm sorry," said the boy-god, "It's terrible, terrible. I'm so very sorry." He invited the girl to have a cup of coffee with him, but she didn't care for coffee, so they sat, and the boy-god drank coffee, and the girl read over the newspaper report and drew her fingers over her friends' names.

A girl and the boy-god were once about to kiss. But before they could, the girl paused and said, "You're only doing this because you want me to join your cult, aren't you?" The boy-god didn't have a cult, but he would have liked one better than most anything, so he replied, "Yes, that's true." Then, realizing his error, he added, "But whether you join my cult or do not, I still want to kiss you." The girl appeared for a moment to be in conflict with herself. And then

she kissed him—but she didn't join his cult, for neither did the boy-god have one, nor did she offer to begin one on his behalf. They parted, and the boy-god felt extremely stupid and somewhat ill.

The boy-god understood something else which troubled him deeply. No other avatar in history had been faced with the indignity of writing his own gospel. Either a disciple came and wrote his gospels for him, or his gospel went unwritten, and the avatar was forgotten. The boy-god had no wish to be forgotten, but was having atrociously bad luck obtaining disciples of any kind. A literate disciple with a memory keen enough to remember the boy-god's words and actions was plainly inconceivable. It is therefore best that the reader does not ponder too actively the origin of the present gospel. These are difficult times for gods and men alike.

If only the boy-god had had the self-assurance to shake his head and say, "You fools that do not worship me. You poor, damned fools!" but really, the boy-god couldn't imagine why anyone would be much better off for worshiping him, except that doing so might cause such a person to dress more creatively. But perhaps it was the boy-god's creative ways of dressing that were his downfall as an avatar. If Jesus had worn pink, would anyone have worshiped him?

And so the boy-god knew that he, the greatest failure the universe had ever known, must do the only good act of which the Fates had made him capable, and kill himself. He awaited the proper time.

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#### SHOP TALK.

The music ended precisely as the girl arrived. The dark-skinned boy, who had been waiting, wearing

a t-shirt marked  
"Rhinebeck Pediatrics  
Rockets, 16," laughed as  
she came in—perhaps  
because her hair was wet  
with rain.

The music that had  
been playing was soft—the  
singer intonated calmly  
about physical love as  
experienced by emotional  
youths or emotional love  
as experienced by physical  
youths.

The dark-skinned  
boy and the wet-haired  
girl started to chatter  
immediately, like good  
friends, not yet good  
enough to share each  
other's company in  
silence. They sat at a  
chess table. The pieces,  
being mere ornaments,  
were never moved. The  
lovers of today are on to  
new games, and when the  
plague reaches a city, they  
flock to its gates. They  
strip off their clothes and  
mingle their sores.

Small thoughts  
expressed in elementary  
words. More inflection  
than language. Chains  
and fetters built with old  
words, old materials  
carried off from  
abandoned factories and

desecrated abbeys. They  
may as well be practicing  
a foreign language. Shop-  
talk in a shopping-mall  
world.

I no longer  
understand words. We  
have so many, yet we say  
so little.

(July 8, 2005)

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#### LOVE LETTER I.

My head is filled with  
irrepressible things; I  
must use the paper as an  
arbiter.

Mainly, I am  
jealous of the men about  
whom your songs were  
written, and I wish that  
they were about me.

Secondly, I regret  
that I have not given you  
more to remember me by.  
I fear that, being never  
reminded of me, it is  
inevitable that you shall  
forget me. And it is true  
that love fades with  
memory.

Thirdly, I am  
grieved that we have never  
truly spoken. Our  
relationship has been  
nothing except a system of

acknowledgements. We have given all our love to each other through the medium of an audience, and have performed it rather than experiencing it. We both serve the world in song; the service we do each other must needs be of another kind.

So I am taking everything that I think will remind you of me and sending it to you by post. May the gods protect it on its way to you. There is nothing I want so much as to be prominent and imperishable in your memory—to be constantly in your thoughts as you are in mine.

I pray that you allow me to give that portion of myself to which I may still claim ownership freely, willingly, and happily to you. Hold it as a charm against the ceaselessly marauding forces of Time. And if you love me, tell me, and free me from doubt—whose company I would cheerfully forsake.

Fear not to entrust me with your secrets. Let fly to me your heart; hitch it to a team of stallions,

for it must travel a great distance. Spare me no fits of passion—breathe every breath as if it were to save me from suffocation. Make foolish promises.

---

## LOVE LETTER II.

Now, as the snow grows hard upon the ground, I search back into the reservoir of my thoughts and realize that I have forgotten all of you. Annabelle, Cedar, My Depressed Angel of the Hundred Ailments—even you, Juliet, whose name fit you like a fat father's burial suit; who are you to me now but the discarded butts of wasted inspiration, burnt up in nervous drags, barely enjoyed and absent-mindedly dowsed in coffee-tins full of wet sand? What am I now but less, even, than this? You—you say you'll sing for your big father's friends, but my name will never touch your lips, I know—I'll not exit whence I never entered. And I'll never sing of you again

either. Your father is dead and you know not who you'll sing for; not yourself, for I gave you immortality, only immortal anonymity, and the most you can be is a dirty secret, shut up in a lyric that nobody cares to hear twice. What are you now but an empty portrait on the cluttered wall of my already moldering posterity? You'll never join me again on center-stage, to meet the blinding gaze of my vacant house, the awed and quiet reverence of my auditorium of echoes.

Juliet: I first saw you in photograph and you looked like a vampire; the flash-bulb washed your face of its color, your eyes gleamed red, and your smile as well—a crooked wisps, an acrid hole of festering lies. When I met you in person, I thought you might be cold. I ran to fetch my coat for you and fell upon the ice. When I brought the coat, you refused it, and I carried it about with me, limping and ashamed. But when my fiancé cast

me as your lover, I was dumbstruck at my luck. From that moment I dreamed of kissing you, and when I could not dream, I lay awake and thought about it: the kiss that would cost me my soul. How like a vampire you turned out to be! You sucked out my life, you possessed me with your eyes, you made me always hungry, you made me crave death and rest and awful vengeance. Whole seasons were wasted on my love for you, and now, when you meet me, you inquire of my wife, and my heart fills up with ideas of murder, and oh! If I had strangled you there in the spotlight we shared, would I not be happy? I could have saved myself some pain by knowing that you liked to be cold, and I could have helped to make you even colder.

You wouldn't kiss me then and you wouldn't kiss me now; one is no longer better than the other. What you were to me, I have been to others. If only I could have seen that we were rivals all along. Well, we knew that

we could not be friends. But did you every finally come to understand that I was jealous of your power over men and horrified at your power over me? I could never overcome you, Juliet; I could scarcely even ignore you. I was miserable as long as you were alive. And somehow, you must still be alive—for I am miserable still, and my misery carries your unendurable rose-petal musk!

Juliet, I have a friend that lives by you, and she is no friend of yours. Juliet, I am in conference with your enemies. We have formed a league, Juliet, and it is agreed that you cannot remain. You have frozen my conscience; it is silent, and I am icy in my intention. I will meet you in the garden, and I will kiss you on the cheek, and you will know that it is I who have betrayed you.

Your ought to have kissed me, Juliet. I would have been done with you sooner! You have forced your way into my thoughts, child, and now

you will learn that there is no more dangerous mind to occupy. The thought of you has grown old and stale; room must be made for others. Juliet, I'm sorry, you must needs be dispatched. I cannot remain a gentleman to those who will not pacify me with a kiss. You must be shrewd to survive in these times—you must come to intuit the means for your survival. I have tried, Juliet—I have tried to make it easy for your; I have tried to make myself clear. You may come to regret now your desire for a man of action.

---

#### LYRIC

It's not that it doesn't  
mean anything to me;  
It's only that others call it  
the act of living,  
And I call it the act of  
dying.  
The meaning isn't altered,  
But my smile is heavier,  
And my laughter more  
costly  
Than theirs.

Look—



I have bored you to tears,  
And borne you to sleep  
With my driveling on  
About death.

(December 12, 2005)

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CANDY: A Seduction in  
Three Parts

I:

Candy said there was trouble at home. She said this to me as she burrowed deep into the bosom of her chair, clenching her knees in her arms, which she had just recently marred. I showed her my scars, feeling simultaneously too old and too young. Candy was rising into some kind of identity; she was falling into some kind of crisis. She was a young, young girl, and she always would be—too young to be on her own.

There was trouble at home. Man trouble. Candy didn't want to go back to that—but it was beyond doubting that man trouble was precisely what she would always return

to. It would become her means of defining the word "home." I should have carried Candy out over my shoulder that night—but I couldn't even carry myself out. I must have seemed unnervingly sane to Candy.

Candy! My heart cried, Why can I not become the name you've written on your school bag? Why am I not your music, O Candy? Why does my voice not carry your song? Oh, it would have made me happy if I were a boy. But there was man trouble at home, and I was a man. My old scars—the strange devices of a long-ago drama—having no connection with hers.

Not enough drama, she thought, looking at me. He should carry me out on his shoulder.

II:

I'll begin with a bottle of whiskey and end with a suicide—just me and Candy. I'll teach her to drink and we'll help each other to die. You've got nothing to live for,

Candy; I should have told you this the first time I saw you. Nothing but man trouble. Let's help each other out of this. Let's embrace the facts and die with flawless certainty—there is no better way. I had to live past thirteen to know what I do now, but Candy's got it better than I had it. She's had as much as she needs; as much as she ought to have; as much as she deserves. This bottle is your future, Candy, and it stinks, and it's murky-brown, and if you get all the way to the bottom, dear, you're just going to regret it that much more. I know I do.

Look at me, Candy. I'm writing all this just so I won't be a complete failure in the morning. But do you think it'll help? Of course not! (You're a smart girl!) Failure will come for as long as morning comes—morning after morning. But you never thought that way, did you? There's hope for you, isn't there? Man trouble! That's your only hope!

That's your every morning! But you don't care, you simpleton! You common little wench! You'll always let them keep you from the death you deserve—the death you deserve with me! Well—here's to you, darling—my first little drink. May you come to your senses before I put down the bottle, and take up my own life, and carry it off alone.

Aren't you happy, Candy? Another day of man trouble—aren't you blest and happy? Isn't this what you live for? Isn't this why you live, and live, and live—on and on like a stupid machine?

I'm sorry if I'm not like that. I'm sorry if I can't seem to find the point. You must instruct me sometime, Candy. You must write me your book of philosophy, and submit it before my academy, and instruct me in the finding of such points as you have so effortlessly found. You must teach me your love of man-trouble. For if I learn this, dear Candy, I'm sure this life will no longer

appear a burden—or at least not so joyless a burden as it is for me now. Otherwise, sit, take the drink that I'm offering, and allow me to clarify your error.

This, Candy, is your heart. It beats and lives within you; it causes you to live and to be beaten. Hence your man troubles. But remember, before you leap up in fear and lose yourself in the night, that I am not a man. Therefore I hold no appeal for your heart, and address only your mind. This is a strange and marvelous exercise—you will soon grow used to it. (Please, drink.)

You must think of every mark you make upon yourself as an effort to assassinate your heart—the source of your woes. If you can only silence your heart, you will be, for once, a sane woman—capable of taking her life, pronouncing it folly, and tossing it away like a loathed scrap of useless rubbish. Your heart alone has use for

this life; I assure you, your mind has none.

Candy! If I had a song worthy of you! But a song that kills hearts—who has such a thing? Any song I could give you now would just send you off in search of man trouble again. Don't love me—that's not what I'm asking for. (Please, Candy, have a drink.) If I wanted your love I would have come in quite another form. I would not, for instance, have so many scars. Could you love a mirror in which you were always reflected as a wasted old crone? Then you cannot love me. Therefore put this from your mind and don't be afraid. Drink with sound intent, Candy. Take every song you have heard and vomit it up. You will wonder then how you allowed them, for so long, to sit and stink in your insides.

These men that cause you so much trouble—are they like me? They give you hope, which I would not. They work

upon your heart, which I could never. Your heart is a thing detested by me—I could not touch it. Therefore your troubles, being with men, are not with me. Therefore I am your guide out of trouble.

Let us drink to the demise of our hearts. Let them prevent us no longer from being the authors of our fates—let them bully us no longer into the dawn. Look! It is twilight and we are near to our great act. We shall be written of with envy for ages to come. We will end in ourselves the tyranny of the heart. We will go beyond the realm of song.

III:

Dear Candy, the light is better this morning; be glad that you can't see me the way that I am, for it is no better than the way I was when you *could* see me. But then, I don't think you're the kind of girl to be disappointed by a lack of improvement. The sort of men you love like to turn around and see the sun twinkling in their own

trails of slime. I'm sorry for always being so earnest with you—but you're always finding me without shoes.

Candy—why don't you look for attention from me? I realize that I'm immune to surprise, but I'm always capable of disdain. Who do I have to kill? I *do* have to kill someone, don't I, lady? You'll write to me in jail, won't you? Oh! The acme of romance! Flannel shirts, white sneakers, white iron bars, you in your best eye makeup, me behind glass. You can do anything to me in there: make me jealous, break me up, force me not to cry. You know they'll make me a man worth holding onto, before they let me return to you.

Candy—do you know—can you believe what I do—what I think—while I'm looking in the mirror? Oh, if not for my scars, I know I could not love myself at all. This body is a marvel!

In an effort to trap a wasp, I mistakenly severed it in half. Its stinging section fell to the floor, where it writhed on its own for full minutes; its upper portion flew wildly about the room until I crushed it with a book. Oh, these bodies are marvels!

What of my mind impels me to wish harm

upon my body? Why do I wish death for my body and immortality for my mind?

But I'm glad I can see you, Candy. I'm glad I can find a face to match your soul.

I'm never happy!

(Completed July 20, 2005)

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## PART TWO: THE DIARY OF BYRON BYSSHE

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"Hovels"  
July 8, 2005

The world has come a long way in facilitating the recurring truth that men (and women) never change. While yesterday we observed the age of the anonymous pamphleteer, today we have the age of the anonymous (or semi-anonymous) voyeur journal-keeper. And while the former was often a person of some means and prominence, exercising his need for

flatulent self-expression while looking after his own reputation, the latter is usually a person of no consequence whatever, settling for a reputation only among strangers – kept nameless more by the multitude in which his voice is but a trickle in the torrent, than by any true desire for his identity to remain unknown. For today, fame and infamy are rarely to be distinguished. We must go seeking for our inquisitors – we must go scouring for

a court with the time or attention enough to castigate or hang us – we must each test the limits of vulgarity, while learning all the while that the vulgar know no limits, and are therefore unimpressed. We must find the ear for which our flatteries are shaped.

My name, Byron Bysshe, is a shamelessly contrived composite of two contemporary characters who, taken as mere self-mimicking silhouettes, merge to create a Platonic ideal of myself. I am, in a sense, a man held captive by and entirely subordinate to the stale winds of history, having no hope of escaping from the fact that I exist in (and, to an extent, against) the shadows of all who walked this globe before me. I am a puppet, as it were, and an instrument of the dead, because, as that wise old Semite posited millennia ago – “There is nothing new under the sun.”

I find, in the graveyard, the truest representation

of temporal existence. We stand and fall only where other men have stood and fallen before us; we stumble on their names and find our rest upon their corpses. Like the faceless fathers of civilization, we construct our hovels by dismantling their palaces, and because they are without voices, we proclaim ourselves greater than they. . . .

“One-eighth-inch of Eternity”  
July 9, 2005

I’ve been trying to sit down and read a book all day – any book, it matters not which. A half-day spent at my kitchen table, staring at the pages of Schopenhauer, observing the flight of words like geese in the distance – trying to discern a shape and a meaning where none is available. Recently I put down Schopenhauer and attempted Heidegger. But my mind is too busy, you see; I’ve no time for the thoughts of other – albeit greater – men. It is too easy for me (and Schopenhauer warns of

this) to turn the books of others in order to avoid my own writing. Since I was a child, my excuse has been the same: I need more knowledge, more knowledge; I'm not yet fit to convey my thoughts, and my thoughts aren't yet fit to be conveyed.

It has become apparent to me over time that to read the philosophers is not to acquire knowledge of philosophy, but merely to acquire knowledge of the philosophers themselves, and to an even greater degree, of the philosophical process. I fear I must cast my lot in with the Behaviorists in saying that there has never been an objective philosopher – a philosopher who could truly peer through the eyes of Divinity. There have certainly been demagogical and megalomaniac philosophers (Nietzsche being an all-too-obvious example), but even these were influenced overwhelmingly by private circumstances to express the thoughts they did. The

world being as they perceived it to be, they formed their thoughts in such a way as to conform to, react against, or at least explain why it must be that way, and what must now be done. But while all philosophies essentially meet, like all religions, at the same fundamental epicenter, each route bears the individual markings of its proponent. There never were originators; there were only ever interpreters. That my life is a little like Schopenhauer's causes me to admire and appreciate the man and his philosophy; not so with, say, Bertrand Russell, with whose life my own finds no abiding correlation. What makes life tolerable for a 20th century English nobleman is not the same as what made life tolerable for a 19th century son of a German lady-novelist, nor is either perfectly agreeable to a 21st century American under-achiever. We share, at best, a few suggestive nuances – none of which

are really worthy of a wink, or a nod, or for that matter, a literary reference. So what is my use for them?

These have been my thoughts as, for god-knows how long, I have moved swiftly from book to book. And I have found that in philosophy, my habits are the same as in any other interest: I go seeking for mirrors. The words I aspire to find are my own – just as, when I go shopping for music, the song I aspire to hear is my own. So I buy a book of Schopenhauer, saying, “Good – I’m a Pessimist, and a sex-hater, and a man overlooked by my peers, just like he was.” And I buy an album by Phil Ochs and say, “I play an acoustic guitar and dream of hanging myself, just like he did.” But I am still looking for myself in the lives of others, and in the end, I close all my books, turn off the music, and conclude my evening by standing in front of the mirror, or in front of a white page, and both are empty. And I am empty.

And my glass is empty, and it must be refilled, and drained again, lest I remain awake any longer to plunge my hands through wisps and my head through shadows.

I often think of myself as a “vampire out of uniform” – especially when identifying, as I often must, with the seminal character of Dracula. I have trained myself – it seems for centuries – to comport myself with the dignity and charm of a much worthier man, but all of this is vain and hollow, for my bed is a crypt and my home is a ruin. I am able to deceive myself and others as long as I can avoid mirrors; but nothing reflects me, for I am beyond reach and without substance. I choose those friends that appear to me delectable; I desert them when their strength is exhausted. Taking bride after bride, I find my comfort always in solitude, always in darkness, always in the cool retreat of my own self-loathing – content only to damn myself again



and again – vindicated by my agony and my assured repulsiveness.

Nothing reflects me. No mirror contains me, no photograph reveals me, no gaze absorbs me in my totality – for in my totality I am nothing at all. All of my perceived aspects, all of my exterior attributes, are as satellites circling a void – quivering delicately upon the lip of my event horizon. In me, light bends and disappears.

Every book of philosophy should bear the title: This is How I've Managed to Excuse my Contemptible Existence. But I shan't be writing a book of philosophy tonight – for I am without excuse.

07.09.05

EARLIER THIS SAME DAY:

Truly, the world is winding toward its end. My hatred of the unbeautiful has culminated in my vengeance against a spider, which had spun its

web between the pedal and the front wheel of the tricycle in my back yard. I freed its quarry – a portly little beetle that lay, twitching, on its back, before I returned it to its feet and sent it staggering away – then, with the tip of a sprig, I demolished the spider's home. As the accursed creature fumbled about in the aftermath, I turned the basket on the back of the tricycle over, allowing rain-water to dash over the whole scene, carrying the wretched arachnid away with it.

Upon witnessing this vulgar spectacle of brutish enmity, the orange cat, waifish though he has become, lost his appetite, and would accept no food from me. In nature, the role of the feline and the role of the spider are alike; they are separated only because they stand on opposite banks of the gulf between grace and hideousness, and then, only to the select – not even the universal – human eye. Guided as I am by esthetic prejudice, I

would nourish one and deprive the other, though the spider's meal be gained in earnest toil, and the cat's in beggardly languor. So you see how ruled by injustice I am.

This, friends, is why our gods must always resemble ourselves, and never the equitable Nature with whose multifarious aspects we dress them. It is impossible for us to pay fearful worship to any god representing balance; for even as we must be petty enough to bribe and petition our deities, they must be coarse and lowly enough to regard our groping effusions. In nature, the wind and the rain and the scorching sun all act in step to continue the world's ancient, intricate dance – guiding our planet through its countless, eon-spanning revolutions – even at the expense of innumerable species, even at the expense of vast continents. But we, being short of sight and young to our Earth, call now upon the sun, and now upon the rain, and now

upon the wind to serve our tawdry wants, which are no worthier than the humblest wants of the basest insect. Being so selfish, we could never comprehend a god of infinite patience, perfect reason, or universal justice.

So to each man a plot of earth, and to each man a stone, and to each man a name, and to each man a space of time in which to give his name value in the memories of those whose duty it must be to bury him. To each man a god, to each man a soul, and to each man a place in eternity – as if the difference between one hundred years and ten thousand years is fit for the consideration of a world, and a solar system, and a galaxy, and a universe as inconceivably ancient as ours. But the longest we can remember any single man, before, indeed, making him a timeless god, is not nearly so long as it requires for the elements to erase his name from the chunk of rock onto which it was

chiseled at his death. And for this reason, we would rather have a tomb of stone than a tomb of gold and silver. We cannot go so far as pondering that the world will someday be entirely free of our names, even if it has long ago relinquished our immaterial memories.

The instant a man becomes pharaoh, he commands his slaves to build him the tallest and most invincible of tombs – and he calls for his priests to reveal, for his sake, the secret names of all the gods – the speaking of which they may by no means ignore.

Unremarkable as all of our lives have been – we shall each at least have our name, set one-eighth-inch deep, in a slab of polished stone, perhaps to be read – more likely to be passed over – by one such as myself, who takes his strolls in graveyards, and thinks only of beauty. We are best when we are dead.

July the Ninth, 2005.

"The Pheasant  
Experience", or  
"Unutterably Alone"  
July 10, 2005

I have been spending nearly every free moment, while otherwise unengaged at work, reading entries on my-journal.com. I can't even recall by which link I first found my way to the site, just a few days ago; but since then, it has come to dominate my attentions with an influence that I am near to calling pernicious. Forsaking, as I have, nearly every other form of frivolity available to the modern citizen – from television, to books of fiction, to crossword puzzles – I have finally found myself locked within the clutches the modern scourge itself – today's rampaging Leviathan: voyeurism – otherwise known as "importunate interest in the private affairs of others, and the mainly mistaken idea that others have an equal interest in my own." Isn't this why I got out of the singer-

songwriter      open-mike  
game – to cure myself of  
exhibitionism – to be freed  
from the exhibitionism of  
others?

We knew the Internet  
would come to this.  
There's no place like the  
modern Occident to have  
the most private of private  
lives, and no place like the  
World Wide Web to direct  
our acrid fumes when the  
time finally comes to  
exhale – or else to explode.  
Used to be a man (or  
woman) had to go out and  
stand on the guard-rail of  
the Brooklyn Bridge to get  
the world to understand  
the terrible gravity of his  
inner conflicts. Today we  
write five pages, single-  
spaced, of incoherent  
stream-of-consciousness  
chatter, post it on a  
website, and go merrily off  
to bed. And unlike the  
days when our journals  
stayed tucked beneath our  
mattresses until such a  
point as we were carted off  
to be cremated, today our  
catharsis is made  
complete by the fact that,  
hypothetically, anyone in  
the world can log onto  
their computers and find

out, from our own hands,  
precisely what is bugging  
us. Only our names are  
secret.

Sigmund Freud stands  
before his easterly-facing  
window, takes a long drag  
from the morning's first  
cigar, and wonders, "How  
am I going to liberate Miss  
X from the suppressed  
sexual fantasies that are  
so evidently tormenting  
her?"

I rub my eyes after three  
hours staring at a  
throbbing computer  
screen and think, "If  
there's one thing Miss X is  
suffering from, it's not  
suppression. Not any  
more."

But Miss X, I know, is  
suffering from that blight  
which affects every one of  
us, and which drives us,  
frothing and sweating, to  
the Internet: namely,  
UNMET EXPECTATIONS.  
All of our conditioning,  
which told us that we  
could have everything and  
be anything, has at last  
proved to be woefully  
incompatible with the  
rigid laws of reality. And

all of our journal entries are like so many Letters to the Editor, or so many Customer Dissatisfaction Cards, haphazardly filled, tossed in a slotted box, and lost in a pile while our frustrations pant on behind us.

The grim realization, sometimes too late in coming, that tomorrow will always be as bleak and full of trials as today, because life always continues at the same second-by-second pace: this is the root of our agony, which so incessantly demands expression. That all of our tomorrows will by no means be any happier than all of our yesterdays, because if we knew what it took to be happy, we would be happy already, quite despite our circumstances: this is the unacceptable and despicably obvious truth which we must continuously rage against with volleys of ill-considered gibberish. We war in vain against the imponderable notion that our lives will not, at any

point, become a constantly-running series of sepia-toned photographs, narrated by the slap of the sea and the murmuring of white-winged gulls. We war in our hearts, in our imaginations, and, at last, upon the page.

So I began this entry by making the tacit vow that I WILL NOT TALK ABOUT MY SELF. And if there is nothing to be done but to talk about myself, than I shall do so in the form of the general, and not in the particular. My life, friends, is your life. The human experience is (it must be true) no more varied than the squirrel experience, or the opossum experience, or the pheasant experience. We run, we eat, we are run over, we are eaten. The details are extraneous to the facts. I suffer. You suffer. Our suffering is comparable even if our afflictions are not. Why, therefore, should we vex ourselves with this duel of details, this parrying of particulars, by which – through our respective

journals – my grievances are pitted against yours?

I will answer for my self. As a lover of beauty – even an immoderate lover of beauty – I must admit that BEAUTY IS IN THE DETAILS. This sunset is beautiful, but particularly the gold which pours itself over the treetops, and bursts in long-reaching rays across the purple garment of the sky. Your face is beautiful, but particularly your eyes, which seem to command the remainder of your features as a queen does her minions, and when turned away from me, draw my hand to your cheek – for your eyes are the power by which my soul is risen to its feet. And within them, and behind them, there are so many details. To love you generally would be to not love you, for then, you could be anyone. And it is you I love. You – specifically you.

This reveals itself as I dash, weary and half-mad, through this perplexing forest of

strangers' journals. In three minutes, I pass invisibly through the lives of as many real, living persons; with a swoop of my eyes, I probe for points of interest – appetizing details – which will cause me to linger, finding, for the moment, some manner of companion. For “In the end,” as Rilke so succinctly affirmed, “we are unutterably alone.”

We are so alone; we who scrupulously record the comings and goings of our days and hours upon this infinite digital tablet. Though our recollections are populated by friends and lovers, wives, husbands, children, parents, enemies and longed-for strangers, we gather here – in cloistered solitude – only to say that we are alone. Here is the substance of my heart – offered in all humility, merely for you to hold. Prove to me that the universe is not emptiness on all sides. Prove to me that in the midst of this wondrous and mortifying illusion, there it is yet opportunity for two souls

to commune, to recognize each other and say, "We are the same." I who am fallen must be drawn up by a traveler's hand; I must be made to walk his road with him – for all the destinations I had set for myself yesterday have proved mirages and chimeras. Together, perhaps, we can settle upon a Truth.

07.10.05

"The Lady Wipes Her Hand"  
July 11, 2005

My entry tonight really ought to consist of a thousand entries I've made in a thousand journals before this one, and a thousand letters of a thousand lies that I've written to a thousand would-be lovers behind the backs of a thousand has-been wives. It won't help the girl to tell her how much I'd like to kill myself. It won't help her to know that the realest feelings I have are feelings of flux; that love, for me, is a rising vacillation which soon gives way to

its falling counterpart – on and on in this way until my heart and life and mind all cease. It won't help her to know that everything I said was true, but it was possibly not specifically true of her. Here's the truth, Dianne. May God guide you to it – for I can guide you no longer in anything. My peace – that peace which I said you caused me to feel – was not owed to you. It was owed to my deception of you, for I am most at peace with myself when I am deceiving others. And I was at peace for as long as you remained deceived. Suicide – the instinct to escape. I'm no poet. I'm a scorpion in a circle of fire. I go to the bottle and the blade and the typewriter at precisely that point when I begin to sweat; when I know that I have brought too much ignominy upon myself to continue living among decent folk, which are the only sort of folk I can stand. I write beautiful things to my beautiful bride – words like I haven't written since we shared our souls and

bared our skins on the top of a desolate mountain. The last thing I ever write can't possibly be a calumny, can it? I am made old by these games. I ran out of excuses for living long ago, but now I've run out of excuses for looking for new excuses. The mediocre loves of my future will never match the epic loves of my hyperbolic past. It feels as if I'm imitating myself. I've become one of those saturnine old charmers that never counted on movies being filmed in color. I turn away as not to see that the lady has wiped the hand, which I just kissed, upon her dress. I don't get photographs in my Christmas cards anymore. But my chocolate cakes are made with love where the eggs used to go. Sorry, everyone. I'll do better next time.

"Beowulf"

July 16, 2005

The same piece of paper has stood in my typewriter for three or four days now – a third filled with two

paragraphs of writing – each terminating in a date, the one paragraph relating in no way to the other. Over the previous two days, I have written eight songs of varying levels of mediocrity, and recorded them in their entirety; and having done so, I hope never to hear them again. What is there to say? I'm bored with myself. In six days, I'll be 23 years old, and then what? Glorious life? Grandchildren? Three kinds of cancer? A few more cars? A few more big moves? Another divorce? What? I was packing up the contents of my bookshelves today, preparing to uproot again – taking a smaller apartment in the town that my daughter, my first wife, and my current wife all were born in. My wife's portion of the shelves bearing the burden of her hurried college career: plays by Beckett and Lorca, O'Neil and Sophocles – drama studies, discourses on theater, politically correct novels by minority authors. . . My portion



buckling beneath the  
weight of Victorian poets,  
theologians, occultists,  
philosophers,  
anthropologists,  
Egyptologists,  
antiquarians; each book a  
failure. MY failure. Failure  
to understand, failure to  
be worthy of  
understanding, failure to  
be worthy of expounding  
understanding or  
expanding understanding.  
Failure to check my own  
failure. How many failures  
have I suffered since  
embarking on this life?  
Failed marriage, failed  
music, failed religion,  
thoughts sputtering  
uselessly up into the  
silent expanses,  
inescapable obsolescence  
as I look again,  
wonderingly and  
helplessly, over the pages  
of Beowulf. . . . Where is  
my Grendel? Where is the  
bard that will sing of it?  
Whine, whine, whine. Why  
don't I just kill myself  
already? Good God – 23  
years old! Who even  
deserves to live that long?  
Not I, certainly! What is  
left in the remaining years  
but to cause more  
suffering and to

experience more  
suffering? Why can I see  
no hope? Why can I see no  
purpose? The commonest  
aspects of existence,  
qualities inborn and  
automatic to every  
washer-woman and day-  
laborer, are imponderable  
enigmas to me! My  
greatest failure – failure of  
all failures – I CAN FIND  
NO REASON FOR LIVING.  
And even in this am I  
unpardonably common.  
There is nothing duller  
than a man without  
purpose and a life without  
meaning. I would be  
luckier to have been an  
enterprising fool than an  
over-read cynic. "They  
said that he was of world-  
kings the mildest of men  
and the gentlest, kindest  
to his people, and most  
eager for fame." But it is  
Beowulf that is  
remembered – not the  
author of his song. I  
should find a better man –  
write his biography in the  
finest language I am  
capable of – and straight  
away put a bullet in my  
skull. All of my words – of  
what worth are they? I  
end, as always, with my

most profuse apology to the reader of this entry.

"Pausing on the Light Switch"

July 18, 2005

Loneliness destroys a person – reduces him to madness, so that in old age, he becomes intolerable to his fellowmen, and his loneliness is thereby only increased. This is evident in my grandfather, and in the old Russian woman, with the small white dog, that shakes her head and mutters to herself as she models plaster necklaces, which she draws, one by one, from a paper plate. Loneliness makes one fretful. To the lonely man, all the world is an enemy – an enemy to whom, in moments of feeble desperation, he confides a life's worth of festering secrets, though he knows all acquaintances to end with betrayal. A lonely man lives not by his own strength, but from the pity of others. There is nothing so worthy of pity – and so readily pitied – as loneliness. I dwelled upon

this thought as my finger touched the light switch. My wife's back was turned – her smooth, white back; I viewed it through the window of her satin nightgown, the color of the moon. She wasn't speaking. I said to her, "I'm allowing myself until tomorrow to become something other than a failure. I'm watching Haley in the morning, and going to work in the afternoon, so I don't know when I'll possibly have time to do something which posterity will regard as a wondrous and ineffable success, but somehow, I must. I cannot live another day in failure. I absolutely cannot." My wife maintained her silence. I turned out the light and went to the kitchen, where I took out a bottle of whiskey and scribbled eight pages in the dark. I read them over this morning. I've never written worse. Loneliness destroys a person. I thought of this, looking at the arched back of my dear, young wife. My beautiful and successful wife. My blameless wife – beloved of all children. My

charming and unique high-school Valedictorian wife. How could she have agreed to accompany such a failure throughout the years? Do not tell me, I beg you, that my only success in life was that of finding so fine a wife. (Though it is true that her only failure was in finding so deplorable a husband.)

Prayers for the Victim,  
July 20, 2005

Dianne thinks I've given up. "Love me with a whisper," I told her, "Not a shout. Love me with a breeze, not a tempest." I would have enjoyed carrying the affair on longer, but circumstances being as they are, it was bound to fizzle out sooner or later. I'm beginning to think – to my abject horror – that I don't have time for teenaged girls any more. Steady, old man. Let's not be rash. Just keep your hair in your eyes, your pout pretty, your half-smile cock-sure; you'll find some new tart with wide-thighs and heavy lashes to dangle about on that rusty little

hook of yours. I'll prove her wrong; I've not given up. I've just pulled in the reel on her so that I can cast out again at some better time, some better place. I'm such a bastard. My poor wife. Jesus, my poor, unknowing wife. But Dianne really was the best since Cassie. (That was her name, wasn't it?) Sorry, reader – I know I'm not saying anything of much intelligibility to you; and I don't know about you, but I despise authors that disguise a lack of real profundity with paradoxical "Zen" vagaries. Not that I pretend to any measure of profundity myself, but nevertheless, it will help no-one to beat about the proverbial bush. I am (it is well-known) something of a flirt. I tend to provoke the attentions of girls a little younger than myself, work upon them tirelessly, and, upon hearing from their own lips that I have enflamed them, and sent them reeling into previously unimagined climes of helpless passion, and that they are entirely and irrevocably and

eternally mine, in all parts, for all time – I inform them that, love them though I do, I belong to another (i.e., my wife), and our misbegotten tryst must, sadly, be discontinued – dropped – aborted before we even have a chance to consummate. I do this over and over, as often as fate gives me opportunity. I don't know precisely why. It was exciting for a while; in the beginning, it always is. But "I love you", like any other often-used phrase, such as "have a nice day", and "you'll be all right", quite quickly looses its potency, its ability to intoxicate – and after that, it looses its savor. The first time one of my little "converts" (as I enjoy referring to them) tells me that they love me, I feel my task to be complete. After this comes the ugly chore of letting them slowly down, notch by agonizing notch. But I'm not the one crying, am I? No – I'm never the one to cry. Could it be that I've become so heartless – so incapable of emotion, that I must tease displays of

emotion out of others, only to taste them again as I once did? The reader will recall an earlier entry, in which I invoked, in regard to myself, the cliché of the vampire. Here, again, the simile is unavoidable. "You don't know what it's like to be a teenaged girl," my wife admonishes me – only half-aware of the truth. No, but I remember what it was to be a teenaged boy, and I would give anything to feel love that way again – to place my whole soul in the hands of another, knowing them to be callous, too desperate to care. I would gladly suffer death to be free of the consequences of living. But that would only mean leaving others with the consequences of my dying. God, show me the fortitude, the clarity, and the probity to come clean with Dianne – to swear that her case is never repeated – to delight no longer in the anguish of others. In all sincerity, and forgetting my doubts, I pray. Amen.

"Birthday Breakfast,"

July 21, 2005

I had a nice birthday – thanks for thinking of me. I don't know for a fact that you were thinking of me, but if you were, thanks. It means a lot, considering we don't know each other. The gifts were of the sort that I've come to expect and look forward to: a better-than-usual bottle of wine, a couple wedges of five-dollar cheese, my wife sending me around the house in search of barely-rhyming, poorly-metered poems, each one bearing a clue to the location of the next. She melted down all of the candles we used in our wedding last October, forming from the wax one large, circular "disc", with the wicks all placed together on it in the shape of a heart. And she rented a ghost movie, the kind that she's usually too timid to let me rent, for us to watch together (under the condition that it still be daylight outside when we do.) It is a delicate act to undertake, the living of a life which is simultaneously very modest and relatively

dignified, but on occasions like this, I tend to feel as if we have succeeded. I spent the morning in Woodstock, deciding it was better that I wait for my wife while she conducted her business there, rather than staying home alone and driving myself into a hopeless state of depression. Woodstock, famous for the music festival in 1969, which bore its name, is now a self-professed "arts colony" – a reputation it actually acquired long ago, near the turn of the last century, by being the home of the Byrdcliffe community of artists. The town now flaunts both its older and newer reputations by playing host to innumerable art galleries, as well as stores selling all manner of memorabilia reminiscent of the hippie hay-day. During this time of year, the village is teeming with affluent Manhattanites who own appallingly over-priced summer homes in the area, and have now overtaken whatever once existed of the local culture

with their patent-leather sandals, Polo baseball caps, and moronic khaki shorts. It was by such persons as these that I was surrounded as I took a table in front of the café, removed from my bag two large books and a pad of ruled paper, and unwisely resolved to start my day by either exercising my intellect, or proving, in words, that I possess such a faculty as might be called an intellect. Looks of scorn buffeted me from every side as the seasonal Imports clacked at each other and ruffled their New York Times Metro sections. Pretending to take no notice, I uncapped my pen and began to scribble my thoughts concerning the ancient programme followed by bumblebees, and how closely it mirrors the programmes of war-making and theologizing carried out, since times immemorial, by men. These considerations led me in no direction deserving of further pursuit, so I folded back my page, re-capped my instrument, and lay down

my pad – repairing my attentions to one of the books. At this, the disdain of my sniggering audience only grew, for they observed that I had brought a heavy volume of Spinoza and a lengthy treatment of Chaucer, and I was opening the Chaucer. I suppose they felt that I was attempting to make light of their own morning reading, for in comparison to such apparently immortal works, even the mighty Times may be regarded as provincial. Since I had taken my seat, the sun had shifted, and the shrub which once provided me with shade now no longer availed. Searing rays pressed unremittingly down upon me, and in combination with the baneful glares of my fellow breakfasters, I felt myself near to fainting. From before me I heard a grumbling concerning a pastry – from my aft, mutterings that somebody's coffee was too hot to drink; but I knew their true complaints. Thinking that the Chaucer had enraged my

companions, I closed my book and looked around, smiling, expecting approval, but receiving only scowls. Thinking to reproach myself, I took up my pad again, writing in it harsh words to my own bitter detriment: *"I'm a worthless piece of shit/ People smell me and the step aside. / I have no place / Carrying on another day, / Offensive to all my kind."* I looked anguished – my anguish was pure – my countenance bore the vow, but it did no good. I was crushed beneath their eyes. In a sudden panic, I swallowed the last of my drink, fumbled to return my belongings to my bag, and flew away – away – away into the refuge of the street, far from that haven of stewing Urbanites with their distant, mounted doctorates and their Brazilian mothers-in-law. I went to the Green – Woodstock's answer to the Boston Commons – and rested upon a stone bench under an umbrella of waving poplars. I filled my pipe with tobacco, lit it with a sigh, and sought

comfort in the Spinoza. A banjo played nearby; I marked my page, closed my book, and tapped my foot as I listened – puffing out great, sweet-smelling plumes in my rapt preoccupation. The music ended and I heard, "You look pretty classy over there, with your pipe and your book." It was the banjo-player addressing me. "You sound pretty classy over there, with your banjo. 'Classy' is not a term generally applied to banjo-players, but in your case, I find it suitable." "Thank you," said the musician. His name was Matt (isn't everyone's?); he was shabbily dressed, had wild orange hair, and a face laden to capacity with piercing. He had been playing banjo, he said, since Christmas last. I was impressed with him, and would have conversed longer, were it not time to collect my wife. We shook hands and I departed. While buying a cup of coffee for my wife, I ran into a woman – dressed, despite the heat, in countless layers of rags – a semi-famous bit of local

“color” whose counterpart in Kingston, the town where I spent my teenage years, was struck dead by a train nearly a decade past. She remembered me from a rock show I had played in Woodstock months ago, in which there was barely any audience, the bands were all atrocious, and I managed to kick over a stack of amplifiers during one of my extravagantly animated guitar solos. She thought the whole thing was fantastic, especially my guitar solos, and confessed to remembering the night fondly myself, despite the mishaps. We reminded each other of our respective names; she wished me good health, and I did the same. I left feeling as if I had come as close to attaining to celebrity status as I ever would – well-regarded in the memories of rural indigents. The ghost of Robert Johnson sang to me in his characteristic, lupine trill. I must mention this. My whole time in Woodstock, I successfully restrained myself from taking

sanctuary in the town’s vast, beautiful, and deliciously overgrown graveyard. I spent my morning amidst my fellow beating hearts; I learned of my enemies, I learned of my friends, I learned a bit of my own soul. But as I passed by the burial ground, on my way to meet my bride, I bowed to the stones and I said, “I’m sorry. I’ve no place among the living, I know it. I’ll visit you next time – you have my word. Next time.” Thus began the first day of my 23rd year.

“It is I who am unworthy.”  
July 23, 2005

My last posting bore ill-tasting fruits. One journal-keeper whom I very much admire, AliceGotHerFix, removed me from his favorites list, while another, Oberone, whose journal I read regularly, wrote a message on my forum, which he titled Piss, and in which he tersely posited that it sounds as if I’m talking to myself.



I am, I admit, far from relishing these sour indications of disfavor. I went back to my latest entry – the one written on my birthday – and read it again, searching for my point of transgression. Having reviewed my words, I am forced to concede that they were of a diminished quality, when compared to earlier, more contemplative entries. I merely recounted the events of my day – the anniversary of my inauspicious delivery from the womb -, free from most of the fatuous or grandiose interpolations to which readers of my young journal must, by now, be accustomed.

My quipping at the expense of the Manhattanites was, I agree, a little overwrought. Throughout the entry, one of my greatest sins was certainly that of suggesting that I possess an intellect greater than, or engage in practices of a higher intellectual value than the owners of summer homes in

Woodstock. For your gratification, O reader, and my own benefit, I will confess that I read what I do less out of sincere interest, than out of an embarrassing need to “prove myself” – to advance my own knowledge and quell, in myself, any redolence of ignorance. There is much that I do, and much that I am, and much that I say, that is nothing other than appearance – one might say, performance.

In truth, I envy the man that can sit in his shorts and his tennis shoes, and concern himself with nothing less trivial than the headlines of the day. It is my particular curse that, in reading the headlines of today, I am able to see only the headlines of yesterday put forth on fresh paper, sounding the endlessly-reverberating knell of historical repetition. Where others are fascinated by the peculiarities of these modern times and the modern life herein, I see men being men, wars

being wars, tragedies being tragedies, and follies being follies, the same today as they ever were, in spirit, if not in proportion. I therefore look to the past to console myself regarding the present, and it is for this reason that most of what I read is old. It is for this reason that I am so very often accused of being old-fashioned, out-of-touch, and, I suppose, a somewhat quixotic as well. And it is for this reason that I am so wretchedly and inexcusably disconnected from my peers, and am labeled by them – and by persons of every generation – as an eccentric.

I shall say this with as little a twinge of self-pity as might be inferred from such a statement: that I am very used to scorn, and I cannot blame those who scorn me. One has not done wrong by choosing to live and think according to his times; one has not done wrong by choosing to participate in his particular sliver of

history, rather than to cynically discount it as being relative to all history, and therefore unworthy of his contribution.

Only allow me to say that it is not my age that is unworthy of my contribution; rather, it is I who am unworthy to contribute to my age.

By God's good grace, I am made to revisit this point of abject humility time after time, in which I am forced to say, as I have said on innumerable occasions before: it is better that I stay silent; it is better that I keep my words only for myself. For my self or my thoughts, this world can conceive of no purpose. It is better that I move through it with all possible care, in utter silence, disturbing nothing, and leaving no scars on any but my own person.

But in this, I have already failed.

"Rock n' Roll vs. the Cerberus of Self-criticism"  
July 26, 2005

I astounded myself the other day by spending six hours at the kitchen table, in front of my typewriter, staring out of the window at the side of my neighbor's vinyl-paneled house. In the end, I managed less than one full page, and none of it was worth keeping – though I kept it anyhow.

I suppose some persons – generous-spirited persons of a less severe mien – would simply call this “writer's block”. Nonsense, is my reply. I'm just a boring old sod with no imagination and no inherent gift for description.

No revelations here, actually. This is essentially how I've lived since I was twelve or thirteen years old: planted in front of a window, chin slumped against my knuckle, trying to dream up something worthy of recording on paper. I haven't spent every waking moment in this manner, naturally – but it

does seem to be the state to which I habitually return.

I suppose this makes me three things: 1) A born writer, 2) a hopeless dreamer, and 3) a pitiful failure in both writing my dreams, and dreaming anything good enough to write down.

To try to loosen my thoughts up a bit, I thought I'd put on some music. At times like this, however, the music – in other words, the creative out-put – of other persons only chagrins me further; thus I found a CD of my own recordings – punk-rock material from last year – and listened to that. I hadn't heard these particular recordings, nor played these particular songs, in some time; not since my last, utterly disastrous gig. I was reminded of how good they were, and how much I enjoyed playing them, even in front of an audience of five nonplussed, middle-aged gallery-goers. Waves of ecstatic abandon coursed

from the CD-player, carrying me from my seat and causing me to pace, agitatedly, in circles, around the kitchen. Every lyric, every chord, every down-beat ignited a nerve in me, ransacking the ivy-thick walls of my rarely-accessed pleasure centers.

I felt this way last while I was watching a video of a gig I had in Woodstock with my old band – an episode alluded to in my journal, a couple of entries ago. The band was abysmal, the audience was small and unappreciative, and I dissolved the group the next day out of exhaustion and anger; but watching it all again on the television in my bedroom, and listening back to our living-room recording sessions, I found myself awash with an inexorable sense of glee.

I assumed my post before the typewriter again, and, with my fingers poised upon the keys, I wondered: why is it Rock n' Roll, or rather, the act of playing Rock n' Roll,

that transports me – as nothing else can – to the edge of ecstasy, freeing me from care, unbinding me from the censure of doubt? Is it only while playing this idiotic music, this primitive, visceral cacophony, that I can overcome my Cerberus of self-criticism, and assume the persona that I carry with me in my dreams?

What if every hour I've ever spent behind my typewriter has been completely wasted and futile, while only the hours spent behind my guitar and microphone have been at all valid, purposeful, or sincere? What does this make of me?

1)A ridiculous should-have-been rock-star, 2) an enactor of travesties against my own intellect, and 3) a failure in that I am neither famous nor brilliant.

"But it sure was fun, wasn't it?" I say to my glass of wine.

"Sure, sure it was," my glass of wine replies, "now drink – quickly – before it all catches up with you!"

And so I drink - quickly.

"I Dropped the Line"  
July 31, 2005

I had the perfect opportunity to do myself in the other afternoon, while my wife was out for the day. I had been trying to write something all day; my mind was exhausted, my life-force nearly extinguished, nothing but misery to look back upon, nothing but misery and ennui to look forward to. I sharpened a knife. . . .

I had made several superficial incisions to my wrist when I wondered whether I shouldn't be trying to stop myself. I took my wine and my knife with me, sat cross-legged by the telephone, opened to the first page of the phone book, and dialed.

"Crisis hotline," a came a flat, non-nuanced female voice.

"Eh, yes, hello," I stammered, "Is this the suicide hotline?"

"Yes it is," she answered robotically.

Several moments crawled by in the uttermost silence. I wondered if she would say anything more, but she was taciturn even in her breathing.

I said, "I'm about to. . . I don't know whether I ought to. . ."

I was about to say that I didn't know whether I should slit my wrists or my throat, but her silence continued, and my words disappeared into the unresponsive emptiness. At last I muttered, "Forget it. I'm sorry," and threw the telephone back into its cradle.

"That's it then," I said to myself, "The Universe wants me to die." By the operator's silence, all creation had spoken. I raised my glass, drank to the bottom; hand shaking, I put the blade again to

my vein – pressed determinedly – drew it downward. Blood rose up where the blade fled and my arm jerked spasmodically away from the source of the injury. Glass, bottle, little black-handled knife, smarting arm, we all went back to the kitchen.

Before the screen door, impounded by sunlight, I crumbled to my knees and sobbed loudly, my grief besotting my cheeks with the black eye makeup I've been putting on as a means of self-comfort. I dug the point of the knife into my navel – pushed a little – released; grimacing, I brought it to my breast, dug a hole into my shirt over my heart, thought of the force necessary to pierce the bone and the muscle – released again. I cried endlessly, seeing no bottom to my sorrow, my desperation for death appealing to my courage. "I'm ruined – I'm wounded," I begged, "Release me from my pain! Don't let me continue out of cowardice!"

Back to my arm – three, four, five long cuts – too fast, too frantic, too overwrought with sadness to make them count. They bled, but not enough. It was 6:15 and time for me to start making dinner.

Somehow I managed to hide these new incisions from my wife until the next morning. She saw them as she prepared to make love to me. Saying nothing, she flew from the bed and ran into the shower, leaving me lying supine, a bit terrified, a bit relieved. "If I do this enough," I mused, "Perhaps we'd never have to make love again." Cheerfully, I went to get dressed.

"It's embarrassing to be seen with you, with your arm looking like that," she told me not long ago.

"I'm sorry," I said. And that's how our conversations always end.

(The day before I lost my virginity to S.J.W., I cut myself to ribbons – till I

could hardly be recognized. But the foul little waif went and did it anyhow. She climbed right on and did everything Nature told her to do. And God, how I've wanted to die ever since. God, how I want this body to die.)

"Farewell"  
August 1, 2005

This is the entry in which, after a month of relatively steady posting on my-journal.com, Byron Bysshe says farewell.

I have learned, through the experience of keeping a journal on this site, that even my thoughts are deceptions; that I am a nexus of impurity, and nothing emerges from me untainted. I am unable to keep from lying to myself, and am doubly incapable of lying to any audience which may be observing me as I relay these calumnies through any given medium. Being incapable of knowing what is truth, even from my own mind, I have no hope

of either finding it or offering it here.

But even this explanation is a little less than perfectly honest. From the ten or so entries which I have made over the month of July, I feel as if everyone on my-journal has had sufficient opportunity to view me, my life, and my way of thinking, from almost every available angle, which, when sorted through and placed end-on-end, will form something resembling (if not identical to) the entirety. Another month, or several months, or year of further entries, will only labor a point which those of one month fairly adequately made by themselves. And may it never be said that I have consciously permitted myself to become a burden or a bore, even to my own diary.

One more thing I've learned about myself over my 23 years on this earth: I have a morose fetish for seeing things end, for imploding those things to

the construction of which I have devoted much of myself. This is an axiom of my personality which can be verified by any of my wives, or band-mates, or accomplices, or fellow ideologues. I live my life, as it were, from suicide to suicide; never allowing any to be my last.

So here it is. Ka-boom. The one you were here for.

Thanks to everyone for reading me, to those of you who read me every time I appeared before you, and especially to those of you who gave me a piece of your mind on my forum, and who placed me on their favorites list, to read me time and time again. I hope you can share my sentiment that enough is enough, and that excess is one crime (perhaps the only crime) of which I may not be accused.

Many Fond Tomorrows,

-Byron Bysshe

P.S. In case you were curious about how things

are coming along with that teenaged girl, Dianne, who was the subject of only a couple of my ramblings, before disappearing into quiescence: she still loves me; I'm coming closer to loving her; the wife absolutely must not know, and that's probably the reason for the whole affair – because when you're as intimate as I am with my wife, a secret is a precious thing to have; and chances are Dianne and I will actually be able to see each other again at some point in October, when she has her own car. It's sordid, it's disgusting, it's too low and too terrible for words – but I'm on a search for love, friends, and if Love has to slap me across the face to let me know she's there, then at least I'll understand that I had Her once, and I can recognize Her, and furthermore, I can describe Her in words.

And maybe then you'll be hearing from me again.

Affectionately,  
-B.B.



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PART THREE: THE METAPHYSICAL AFFAIR OF DIDYMUS  
AND AMELIA: An Epistolary Romance

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Tuesday, June 21

Dear Amelia,

I hope that my wife's reaction yesterday did not leave you too alarmed or unsettled. She was less troubled that I was with you than she was that she had been looking for us for so long, and she was already in a sensitive state from happenings earlier in the day. She sobbed much of the way home, and then we saw a movie. We slept without ritual, fanfare, prelude, or incident.

She and I had a nearly catastrophic falling-out this morning, of the kind which seems to replay itself every couple of months. Today's, in the usual

fashion, ended with something of a reluctant "renewal" of our marital "lease"; not a new understanding, really, but a reiteration of what she and I each believed the other already understood.

Remember this, my dear: assume nothing. We will always be surprised by our own incapacity to truly understand or empathize with the mind of another, no matter his or her closeness to us. We will always be astonished at how secluded we are made by our own thoughts and desires. "In the end," says Rilke in his *Letters to a Young Poet*, "we are all unutterably alone."

If our intimacy increased, Amelia, do you suppose that we could

ever begin to argue? Or do you suppose that you could accept me for everything I am, without exception? Can you imagine us as having a quarrel? What would we quarrel about? I don't think I could quarrel or remonstrate with you: you would silence me with your eyes.

Yours (inasmuch as I am mine to make myself yours,)  
-Didymus

*Tuesday, June 21*

*Didymus,*

*Your wife's reaction yesterday was expected. I hope she is better today. I would love for our relationship to become more than it is right now, but as long as you are with her, you and I both know that that can't really happen. I think that if there were anything for us to argue about, it would be the fact that you have this fascination with causing pain to yourself. I love everything else I know about you, but it would be*

*difficult for me to accept that you do that. If I understood why you do it, it would make it easier for me. I know many people that hurt themselves, but there is always a reason, and always something else that you could do. I hope to hear from you again soon.*

*Love always,  
~Amelia*

Wednesday, June 22

Dear Amelia,

Although the impulse to do myself harm is always with me, I do not follow it very often at all, unless I am quite drunk. I am often in the same position, as regards self-injury, as I was during our interlude in the upper room of the theatre: I was driven by an almost irrepressible inner insistence, which was only held in check by knowledge of the consequences which such an act would almost certainly have brought about. To injure myself these days must be a supremely callous and

careless act—a malicious project against those who care about me. And, as I learned when I last slit my wrists, the sleepless night in the emergency room—and the ensuing doctors' bills—are never worth the satisfaction of seeing myself bleed.

I know there is a large—and probably growing—number of self-injurers in America presently, especially among the younger generations. Self-injury, particularly cutting, seems to have come into vogue in certain circles, and is perpetuated not only by a cutter's individual inclinations, but by the fashionable status which brazen acts of self-mutilation have achieved within such cliques. I wrote a book of poems for cutters, titled -----, but as might be expected, most cutters who read it were unwilling to follow me in over-philosophizing their condition. I understand now that, for most cutters, self-injury is a superficial reaction, in a superficial world, to mainly

superficial problems. It may have been the same for me when I was younger, and myself concerned with essentially transitory matters. Now it is only a shameful habit that I must labor vehemently to suppress.

I believe that when you said that you would "love for our relationship to become more than it is right now," you mean that you would like us to be more physically accessible to each other—free to follow our carnal impulses to whichever extremity Nature may intend. I have already said that it was difficult for me to deny myself when I wanted to kiss you. But whether I refused the provocations of license for my wife's sake, for your sake, or for my own sake, I am still not wholly decided.

Whatever the truth may be, I ask that you would join me in pursuing as close a relationship as may be sustained free of physical exchanges, at least until we are in such a position as allows us to delineate our physical boundaries without

danger of interruption or discovery. I consider you to be a figure of awe-inspiring beauty, it is true. But I believe your mind to contain treasures of comparable value to those possessed by your ineffable physical charms. There is more than one way to dazzle a gold-smitten treasure-seeker such as I. I shall stand, arms outstretched, in my circle, awaiting the intoxicating incense of your irresistible spell.

Yours lovingly,  
-Didymus

Thursday, June 23

Didymus,

*I suppose I don't really have a huge problem with anything you do. It just concerns me when people find it necessary to cut themselves. I understand why most people do it; I just wish they wouldn't.*

*It is very difficult for me to be able to have a relationship with someone if I can never see him. I'm the type of person who needs physical contact.*

*I've spent a long time thinking about the fact that I am never going to be able to see you, and I still want to have any kind of relationship I can with you, because I really do like you. I've also been thinking about the fact that you are married, and no matter how much I may like you, and how much time I may dedicate to you, there is a chance that nothing will ever happen between the two of us. I'm willing to "wait" forever, if I know that all the waiting will result in our being together.*

Love always,  
~Amelia

Tuesday, June 28

My Dear Amelia,

My apologies for my silence: I've been away for a few days.

I must conscientiously prohibit myself from assuming, in my correspondence with you, the tone of a person "experienced" in matters of the heart, instructing

one who is “inexperienced” in such matters. I would like to believe that, within our personal spheres, we all understand our hearts as they operate within us for the present moment, and that only forthcoming circumstances will modify or alter the desires or requirements of our hearts in the days and years to come. Thus to say that you are “the type of person that needs physical contact” now, is only to say that physical contact (presumably of the romantic kind) is a means for the expression of your heart’s needs and interests, which, because it has not yet been thoroughly explored or exercised, still urges your attention. Only after experiencing a consistently and predominantly physical relationship with another, and realizing for yourself the inadequacy of mere touch—mere sensuality—for the communication of profounder yearnings, will you understand that physicality is a measure we employ for ourselves and against ourselves,

using others merely as aids and implements, and therefore a “physical relationship” is a contradiction in terms: the mind *relates*; the body only *responds*.

This being said, there is nothing more hollow or less efficacious than physical contact between two persons whose minds are not in perfect communication. If the mental bond is weak, it will be destroyed altogether by the introduction of Nature’s brutish and self-serving intentions. Love-making, in the end, comes to about as much good as a fist-fight between two drunks. Intoxicated with the poison of Nature’s ancient and impartial mating-frenzy, both parties will depart from the experience bruised, humiliated, and ignorant as ever. Animal sensuality, which is physical, and Human love, which is intellectual, have nothing to do with each other, except that they are combined in one mortal frame.

By coming to this perspective, we realize that the ultimate end of a human life is to bring two absolute contradictions into a harmonious balance: a balance (or lack of balance) which will be crystallized and perpetuated upon the defining moment of one's death. Lust for bodies today, and you will lust for bodies forevermore, even after yours has ceased to be, and you will attain no rest. Seeking today after the sublime virtues of the soul, however, and finding yourself, at the moment of your death, in the *fellowship of souls*, you will be finally at home—no longer plagued by the torturous inclinations of an alien and ephemeral body.

The heat and cold, pain and pleasure, wetness and dryness of physical existence only mirror those heights and depths which define the journey of our souls; only by suffering them philosophically and experiencing them with detached aloofness (as one

might walk through a dream) may we train our spirits for the ardors of self-discovery. We must remember that as long as our bodies and our spirits are united in mortality, our decisions regarding the one will always bear noticeably and continuously upon the other. You must guide your body as if it were your soul, and your soul as if it were your body. Until death, neither may be regarded as exclusive.

All of this has merely been said to support a single point: that if your wish is to be near me, your goal should be to guide your spirit into closeness with mine. Live the life of the body, however, and you shall die the body's death. Considering the greatness of possibility I have already perceived in your spirit, it would cause me an eternity of sorrow to watch that spirit come under the subjugation of your physical inclinations, and to see it starved and shriveled while your body seeks in vain for corporeal satiation.

With all of this out of the way, it remains only for me to say, in full consideration of the obstacles, impediments, and exigencies of the language: I love you.

Quite entirely yours,  
-Didymus

Tuesday, June 28

Didymus,

*I think I've read this letter at least twenty times. I don't know how I am to reply. You've completely shocked me by saying, "I love you." It just made me so happy, I can't believe that you said it. I want to know that you really mean it. I know I can't see you, so I'm believing in my heart that we love each other, and when we can see each other, it will be because we can be together forever. I know that "forever" sounds like a long time, but I do—I really do—want to be with you—forever. I love you, I really do. It's hard for me to be so in love with someone who is married, and whom I may never*

*really be with. Didymus! You have to do something about the fact of your marriage! I want to be with you so badly, but I can't be as happy as I should be, knowing that you are married. If you love me like you say you do, then you should be able to be with me. I'm sorry, but it hurts me, because I think that you don't really want to be with me. Before I get myself any more upset than I already am, I am going to find something to occupy my time with.*

Love always,  
~Amelia

Tuesday, June 28

My Dear Amelia,

Not wishing to cast myself irretrievably over the brink of the metaphysical, I would only remind you that when you use the word "with," you are implying (so far as I am able to judge) consistent physical closeness and intimacy. If you are not already *with* me, Amelia, you are very close to me,

and growing closer with each profession of love. That are bodies are not within sufficient distance of each other to touch should be of little concern to our souls, which are the true sources of our preternatural and intellectual love, and which, while not being ignorant of the beauty related through the preceptors of the eyes and touch, nevertheless do not require these data to be assured of their relationship. Though my eyes were enamored upon meeting yours, and my fingers electrified upon touching your face, it was my mind which was provided with the profoundest thrill of *knowing* you. Far above any tactile sensation, I am a lover and admirer of knowledge, and it is my knowledge of you which most inspires and facilitates my love.

Marriage is a social, and moreover, a political contract—a matter first of convenience, and second (if at all) of deep or lasting affection. While my wife retains me on the physical

level, my spirit is still quite free to take refuge with yours.

It must be difficult for you to agree with me on this point, but I must persist in my claim that your perturbation at not being able to lay physical hold of me should remain slight, providing you are able to conceive of our union *philosophically*, for the time-being. To employ dearly religious terms, consider my marriage to be the cross upon which I am suspended, and your love to be the vow and the habit of your Order. Though heaven awaits you following your devotions, for the moment, Philosophy and Forbearance must, by your bidding, intercede. We have both made our covenants, and must abide with them. Between my agony and your unfathomable sorrow, there stretches the life-line of our shared Passion (Passion, that is, in both the ecclesiastical *and* the original sense.)

There will be a time when we will be able to commune on something



other than the spiritual and intellectual level; I shall be vigilant for the opportunity. Until then, be patient, be faithful, and know that my love for you is as real as the ground beneath you and eternal as the sky above. I will never tell you anything but the truth.

Look beyond your immediate senses to realize that we are now, at this moment, as close and closer than we have ever been.

Eternally and entirely yours,  
-Didymus

*Tuesday, June 28*

*Didymus,*

*This is probably going to be the shortest letter that I have ever sent to anyone, but I guess that that's because I only have one thing to ask: Do you honestly ever see us truly together forever? I love you, Didymus. I'm sorry, but it's really hard for me.*

*Yours always and forever,  
~Amelia*

Wednesday, June 29

My Dear Amelia,

I have said enough that is long and difficult, and I shall try to honor the urgency of your question with as much clarity as can be made to serve. The answer is *yes*, I honestly do see us existing in a state of pure and sublime communion together *forever*.

Please do not lose sight of the fact that, by using the word "forever," we are consciously placing ourselves in the realm of the infinite; we are disregarding all temporal measurements and the strictures of mortality—and *physical* circumstances being what they are, we are thereby following the wisest of courses.

I am entirely aware of the state of your heart, Amelia—that it is drawn to great lengths and tested beyond the capacity of your experience. Let your heart remain with me and free yourself from worry. I will be your guide through

this, and will teach you what you have not yet been given to understand about love—*perfect love*—such as you have not dared to believe in.

Your love will give you strength.

Endlessly yours,  
-Didymus

*Wednesday, June 29*

*Didymus,*

*I love you! Just don't hurt me. One thing that I keep thinking about is how you say that you are sure that we are going to be able to be together forever. But what is your plan for your wife? You know that we can't be a "we" with her! I'm sorry, but these are things that you have to help me not to worry about.*

*Love always and forever,  
~Amelia*

*Thursday, June 30*

My Dear Amelia,

My plans for my wife are precisely as they have

always been; they bear not at all upon my intentions for you—or our intentions for each other. If I had expected you to be her replacement, I would not love you as I do.

I have so much to tell you about the nature of the world, the nature of man, the nature of Nature. Let my words comfort you for now; patience during this season will yield all the fruits you are looking forward to in the next.

I know how obscure my designs must seem to you. Our ascent is precarious, the way is dark, and I must lead you gently, step by step, by the hand. *Reach, Amelia!*

Faithfully and  
affectionately yours,  
-Didymus

*Thursday, June 30*

*Didymus,*

*I am "with" you right now, and I'm happy with that, but I can't know that I will ever really be entirely yours unless you don't have your wife. If you say*

*you love me so much, then why can't we be together—without her? Didymus, as I have said before, and I always will be able to say: I love you. I do need to know though, Didymus, that your wife's not going to be part of your life like she is right now. I can't wait forever—I don't want to—though I know I probably will, because I won't be able to stop myself. But I need to know that she's not always going to be there.*

*A question, for my own curiosity: What would you have done if I had kissed you upstairs in the theater that day?*

*Yours forever,  
~Amelia*

Friday, July 1

My Dear Amelia,

A man may enjoy the fruit of an apple tree while sitting in the shade of an oak, and not be concerned as to which tree he should chop down for the sake of the other. The oak tree gives shade and the apple tree gives fruit—only in

the combination of the two does the man find both rest and sustenance.

Having already been divorced once, I believe that I married my present wife because I knew that, remaining single, I would never be at rest. Nature would pester me, as it does all unmarried men, to take another mate. I decided to put a stop to Nature's nagging before it became too garrulous a distraction from my higher work. So it is that in my wife I have *physically* come to rest; she provides me a harbor, an anchor, and a measure of certainty that the most mundane aspects of my earthly existence will not have to entirely dominate my attentions. It is true that she lacks many of the spiritual victuals upon which my heart and my intellect are reliant, but I have learned, in my few years of living, that one cannot expect to have both fruit and shade from the same tree. This is why every marriage (despite what moralists would have you suppose) is full of secrets. My wife

wonders why I maintain so stern a silence at the breakfast table. It is because all that I find worth saying, I say in my letters to you. I belong to each of you in once sense, and am absent from each of you in another. For everything there is an opposite—and for everything a sacrifice.

You have the better of the bargain, Amelia. What I am physically will soon become flaccid, hideous, dilapidated; time will not spare me this commonest and most terrible of eventualities. But what I am intellectually and what I am spiritually will only advance as, being, year by year, loosed from the myriad entanglements of flesh, my mind is prepared for its flight from the flesh—its ascension toward the Original. This is the journey *you* shall share with me, and long after our bodies have been dispersed among the elements, our two intellects will remain companions on a superior plane. Of this I am very sure. At present, my wife

is only a *material* impediment to us, and this only because your understanding of existence is still captive to the obfuscations of the material world. There is no distance and no barrier between our spirits.

In answer to your question (which is, I hope, only the first of countless questions to come)—I was surprised that you did not kiss me in the attic of the theatre, but I was pleased at your self-restraint. You had me, physically, in a position of considerable weakness. I doubt that I could have seriously countered or refused any form of advance from you—being that I am only a man after all, and a young man at that. If you had kissed me, I would have almost surely—if a bit reluctantly—reciprocated with an unbecoming enthusiasm, and then—I dare not ponder it further! I have much I am anxious to teach you, Amelia—but lessons of that kind deserve more inviting classrooms.

You are more precious to me than words can tell. Happiness is not unattainable; we shall find it together, with patience.

Yours eternally,  
-Didymus

Monday, July 4

Dear Amelia,

I'm sorry I didn't just say this to begin with: I don't have any intention of leaving my wife for you. I cannot ask you to appreciate how inseparable and inviolable our marital bond is, but I have purchased physical and emotional security at the price of conforming to the most sacred statute of marriage: that I remain the physical property of my wife. I was never at liberty to share a physical relationship with you. That I didn't make this absolutely clear from the very beginning of everything is *my fault alone*, and I completely anticipate your fury at being so deceived and maligned. My encouragement of your

sensual attachment to me—or to the idea of uniting with me physically—muted though it was by my shameless trumpeting of platitudes—was reprehensible, and, in fact, evil. Through my conduct with you, I have acted as an agent for the provocation of those same impulses which I pretended to despise, and to guide you in overcoming. I beseech your pardon, and the pardon of the Intellect to whose auspices I aspire. Forgive me.

No, it shall never be “just you and me,” Amelia. I don't want a different wife, and even if the law permitted me to take two wives, I am barely resourceful enough to keep a roof over just one. I want very earnestly to share a profound, relevant, and everlasting bond with you; but that bond must not, for both of our sakes, admit to sensuous exchanges.

This places the matter in your hands, my dear—to decide whether you will forgive me, and whether our love will

persist in a form other than that which you would have seemingly preferred.

Yours humbly,  
-Didymus

*Tuesday, July 5*

*All I can say is that I love you, Didymus, and I don't want to lose any kind of relationship that we have. You're an amazing person, and now that I've met you, it will be hard only being friends. But it's better than nothing.*

*Love always and forever,  
no matter what happens—  
~Amelia*

Tuesday, July 5,

My Dear Amelia,

I confess that I was not expecting you to show such equanimity. I am entranced, now as I was before, by your unblemished purity of heart. We should not balk at the notion of friendship. "Friendship" today is a much-abused term, and in reference to the

overwhelming majority of our acquaintances, it is criminally misapplied. I am often hard-pressed, upon sincere scrutiny of those bodies and personalities by whom I am surrounded, to find even one among them upon whom the title of "friend" may appropriately and justly be bestowed. You have proved yourself to be a shining exception—a genuine friend, and a comfort to my wan and withering soul.

Thank you, beloved Amelia, truest of friends! I will seek to be worthy of your incomparable kinship, my heart's faithful and guileless companion! The best of me—if it may be said that there is a best of me—is unreservedly yours.

With the totality of my being,  
-Didymus

*Thursday, July 7*

*Didymus,*

*I know that we are obviously never going to be*

*together—but am I ever going to be able to see you? I can't just talk to you through letters. It's hard for me if I can't see my friends. I'm a very social, outgoing, creative person, and these constant letters aren't working very well for me.*

*Love always and forever,  
~Amelia*

Friday, July 8

My Dear Amelia,

I am, I promise, just as anxious to see you as you are to see me. I find our all-too-brief correspondences to be unsuited to a relationship which, admittedly, began in the realms of sight and touch. I miss the wondrous serenity that your physical presence brings to me. My spirit these days is embroiled in a state of continuous tumult and agitation; some time alone with you may well dispel the tempest. But it will be difficult to arrange.

My wife, you should know, is aware of our

writing to each other. I have convinced her—not without effort—that are exchanges are innocent to the utmost degree; but to make preparations for a rendezvous with you would rekindle her suspicions, with explosive effects. Meanwhile, to meet with you secretly would be marital suicide—for secrets that size are impossible to conceal. She is so doting, so pure-hearted, so devoted! I cannot stand to deceive her, to usher her into such turmoil. But my heart, my mind, and my body all yearn to have you near—so what shall I do?

My wife and I shall, at the end of this present month, be taking a new apartment in K-----. And in the fall, my wife will begin a new job in the distant town of P-----. If you have some means of finding your way to K-----, and of finding your way back, we may be able to convene someplace. But the timing would be most delicate, and the consequences of a miscalculation, unthinkable.

Alternatively, my wife has recently been elected to the Board of Directors at the theatre where you and I had our first encounter. If it happens that I am available on the night of the meeting, I can accompany her under the pretense of “not wanting to be left alone for fear of drinking too much and hurting myself,” and meet with you—however briefly—at some agreed-upon spot in your village.

These are the best plans that I am now capable of devising. Believe me, I have considered them both at great length and with great frequency. It bothers me somewhat that all of this must be done without the express knowledge of my ever-faithful and ever-patient bride; but I know that either way, I shall never be at rest, and to see you again would be of immeasurable—if only momentary—comfort to me.

I beg your gracious indulgence until then.

Lovingly and anxiously  
yours,  
-Didymus

P.S. I don’t know if you will be at all sated by my enclosing of a photograph. Of course, it is not the same as being in my actual, physical presence—but it may come to your aid when contact of any other sort is impossible.

*Saturday, July 9*

*Didymus,*

*I’m going to take you home with me. I’m sorry! It’s the first thing that popped into my head, and I had to say it. Honestly, I don’t know what to tell you. I want to be able to be truly yours forever, and I’m not positive, but it sounds as if the only reason you won’t leave your wife is because you don’t want to hurt her. It seems as though—and I could be wrong—you do want to be with me as much as I want to be with you. If you didn’t want to be with me, you wouldn’t have thought about a way that we could spend time*



*together. I love you. My heart and every part of me belongs to you. It's really hard for me knowing that you are married and that any time I see you it will have to be a secret. I obviously can't make you, but it would be nice if you could think about me and your wife, and ask yourself honestly who you would want to be with more. I don't want to talk to you just through letters, and if I do see you, I will have to hide it from everyone. I just want to be with you. Please think about everything I've said.*

*Yours forever,  
~Amelia*

Sunday, July 10

I am infinitely sorry to be the cause of so much turmoil for you. I wonder: could I have saved you from it by never asking for your address? If we had never spoken after that day at the theatre, would you have dismissed me completely from your thoughts?

It grieves me to merely consider it. I

didn't wish to leave your thoughts—which is of course why I wanted to write to you. I wanted in some part to remain with you. Yes—this is what I mean to express: that I wished we could have been together longer.

You don't know in what a state of dolor and with what impenetrable melancholy I pass my days, Amelia! I am inured within casements of silence, with my mind and soul crying constantly for rest! And with you I felt at rest—I truly did. Pouring forth my effulgent deluge of worries and perturbations upon you, you bore them all, and with your eyes you diffused them into the ether. All that vexes me and fetters me you dissolved with your mere being, with your purity, with your radiant, absolving presence. God! How I have wanted that again! Though I admonish myself bitterly for saying it, it cannot be withheld: to be with you would heal all that afflicts me. How could I not long for you?

But again—how can I ask you to understand the indissoluble bonds by which my dear wife and I are held? In three years' time, we have reconstructed our lives entirely around each other. We own everything in common—she is the second mother to my little daughter. Even if my world were to survive her extrication from it, I am sure that her world would not survive mine, and that my daughter's world would be wrecked utterly in either case. It is not a matter of not wanting to hurt my wife. It is rather a matter of not wishing to annihilate the existence that has been built out of our union, lest in removing one of the supporting columns, the whole structure falls and crushes everyone beneath. I would be buried forever, and not even you could extract me from the ruins; or not, in any case, in anything but fragments.

I know how unfair it is of me to say that I need you both. But I know no other solution. I

have no excuse for my selfishness, except to say that you are in your rights to spurn me, to renounce me, to despise me. Truthfully, you must know—I need you. Somehow, my perfect Amelia, we shall see this to a happy conclusion—for everyone.

Please be patient with me, darling. I do love you.

Yours always,  
-Didymus

*Monday, July 11*

*Didymus,*

*Sweetie, you have no reason to be sorry. If you never got my address, and you never talked to me ever again, I would probably be even more upset than I am now. I would be continuously thinking about you and missing you.*

*You say that you want both of us, but you know that you can't have both of us. Didymus, I want to be with you—I want to be able to touch you, to have you next to*

me. I want to be able to cry on you. But no matter how much I want any of that, I am never going to be able to have it. I need you more than you need me. Nothing I say is going to make any difference; I need to be able to see you, but I can't.

I just need you to tell me one thing: Are you ever going to leave your wife? Because if you're not, I need to find a way to make myself not need you and not want you. I can't keep being in love with you if nothing is ever going to happen. I want to be yours forever, and I can't be if you're with someone else. I've said the same thing five different ways. I need to know that you understand. All I do is think about you, and, yes, I have cried. I can't be in love with someone whom I will never have. If you can promise me that we'll be together, I'll do anything I can—but I know that you can't make that promise, so I'm giving up. I just can't do it anymore.

I'm crying right now. I just can't put myself through this. I

don't even know what more I can say. If you can't tell me that we'll be together I think I'll just die. Believe me, I know it's not easy for you, but if you really wanted or needed to be with me, I think you would be able to find a way.

I keep thinking I've seen you before. I don't remember when, but when I saw you a couple months ago at the theater, it felt as if I was falling in love with you for the second time. Honestly, I don't know if I made you up in my mind, but I know that I've seen you before and that I've fallen in love with you before. I keep thinking that there must be some reason why I met you again. Something or someone wants us together!

I've run out of things to say, and it's hard for me to write when I'm crying. So I must end.

Your always and forever,  
~Amelia

Saturday, July 16

My Dear Amelia,

Forgive me for brooding too long upon these words and not responding to you with the swiftness that you are owed.

All that we have in this world—all that is of any value to us—may be expressed in weeping. We know what was best in life because we grieve upon losing it. Insofar as we may never truly be in possession of anything, including ourselves, we at least may come closest to possessing our regrets. At our most desolate, our regrets become our truest companions. “What could have been” is invariably superior in nature to what actually is, or what actually was. This is a bitter consolation: how unfaithful we are to the truth, and how fondly we defer to our imaginations. Love—especially love—has no use for truth; it is an impractical means for serving a devious Nature. We are all fools in love.

So why, when I am so in love with you, do I continue to act so practically—and with such cowardice?

I’ve lived an appalling mess of a life, Amelia. I’m so indescribably weary of it all. In six days I turn twenty-three. I’m tired. It requires less of me to serenely welcome the onslaught of new regrets than it does for me to avoid them. Even though I am in love, I no longer possess the will or the energy to act upon them. I must play out this romance without the shipwrecks and the swordfights.

I do not wish to lose your love, Amelia. I ask only that you love me gently—with as little force as you are capable of. Love me with a whisper, not a shout; love me with a breeze and not a tempest. I shall do the same for you.

Yours eternally,  
-Didymus

*Sunday, July 16*

*Didymus,*

*I have only one thing for you, and that is that you have given up. I will*

*always love you—I can promise you that; but now you have given up, and eventually, I will give up too.*

*Love forever,  
~Amelia*

Sunday, July 24

My Dear Amelia,

I wanted you to know that my wife has now been elected vice-president of the theatrical board. This position will, I hope, result in more frequent trips to your village, on which I will likely accompany her.

I still want to see you. I'm sorry to have fallen so short of your ideal. Please say that you'll come and meet me some night—somewhere we can be alone together, if only for a short while.

I know you wanted more than this, but I want you to have as much of me as I can still give. Our time is coming. Please be patient.

Yours lovingly,  
-Didymus

Monday, July 25

Didymus,

*I wasn't expecting a letter from you, but I'm very happy that I got one. I have missed you. I want to see you, and depending upon what night it is, I may be able to—but not until October. I am staying with my mother now in W-----, which is far away if you don't have a car. You have to tell me when you are going to the theater. Maybe I could make up an excuse for my mother to drive me.*

*I love you,  
~Amelia*

Monday, July 25

My Dear Amelia,

My heart swells at the news that you still want to see me at all! I'll try to be attentive to my wife's movements, so I know when she has business at the theatre. Let us hope that we don't have long to wait.

October isn't so far away. It's tragic that you

don't have more freedom of movement, such as your own car. I drive, of course, but my wife and I share the same automobile, and I am at the liberty of her incessantly active schedule.

I am, at least, not so keenly watched by my current "keeper" as I was by her predecessor. My first wife was constantly suspicious, and capable of developing the most imaginative theories regarding my supposed delinquencies.

Be glad, my darling one, that you are not married to me.

Yours lovingly,  
-Didymus

*Tuesday, July 26*

*Didymus,*

*When I can see you, what are we going to do together? I know October isn't that far away, but it seems amazingly far away to me. And why should I be glad that I'm not married to you? I love you. I don't think there is*

*anything you could do to change the way that I feel about you. If I were married to you, we would never be separated—unless, of course, you left me.*

*Yours always,  
~Amelia*

*Tuesday, July 26*

*My Darling Amelia,*

When we are finally able to see each other again, I'm sure our feelings will find the proper way to express themselves. To hypothesize further would be to wander again into the realm of over-idealization, which, as you recall, nearly ruined us once before.

Despite the constant and unrelenting deluge of pity that I feel for myself, I have also miraculously managed to reserve some, over these past five years, for my wives—who, while not pitying me themselves, have nevertheless had to suffer the companionship of a singularly pitiful husband. Merely to love a

wretch is one thing—but  
to be bound to a wretch  
by a sacred and  
(ostensibly) inviolable  
contract—this is  
something else. My  
darling, you have no idea  
what it costs the person  
that hopes to love me  
“forever, no matter what.”  
To quote the lyrics of a  
song I wrote not very long  
ago:

Won't it be nice  
To live life  
without tripping on me?  
Without having to  
come home,  
And chase out the  
rainclouds,  
And sweep up the  
cobwebs,  
And climb in a  
death-shroud  
With me?

To be married to me is  
something of a death-  
sentence. It places the  
bride in a position like  
that of Persephone, who  
was compelled to marry  
Hades, god of the  
underworld. The  
tenebrous screen of self-  
consuming gloom that  
surrounds me is

poisonous to any spirit,  
regardless of how resolved  
she is to love me and  
abide with me. I am never  
fully present in this world;  
a portion of me (often the  
ruling portion) resides  
with the dead. It is a  
difficult matter to explain.

I recently happened  
across an old notebook of  
mine, with notes written  
to me by my young wife  
during my first marriage.  
She pleaded to know why  
I never appeared happy—  
begged me to show her  
how she could change,  
how she could reinvent  
herself and become  
something pleasing to me.  
I answered, in lengthier  
terms than I provide here,  
that I will never and can  
never be happy in the  
commonly accepted sense,  
so it was useless for her to  
alter herself, as it would  
make no difference. But  
she could not accept this  
answer. “Show me how,”  
she kept writing in note  
after note, “Show me how  
I can make you happy.”

She was, of course,  
rapidly exhausted from  
this effort, and the  
marriage survived only a  
year. The first

anniversary of my present marriage is in three months' time, and I await it with the utmost trepidation. Since my current wife is not a believer in the supernatural, I have had even less success explaining to her the source of my impenetrable sadness than I had with my first wife. Something tells me that she will not long be satisfied with a husband who exists with his body on the surface-world and his mind in the grave. She is too much alive—too much devoted to life for living's sake.

Knowing only this about me, how can you still love me with confidence?

Yours always,  
-Didymus

*Tuesday, July 26*

*Didymus,*

*I love you so much because you're different. You seem to be as in love with me as I am with you! When I was with you, even though it was only once,*

*you made me feel special, wanted, loved. I'm convinced that if we were ever together, I wouldn't have to do anything to change myself in order to make you happy. I believe—and I could be wrong—that if you really love someone, you'll have no choice but to be happy. So if you love me like you say you do, you wouldn't be able to be unhappy around me. How can you honestly and truly love someone if she doesn't make you happy? That's one of the reasons why I love you, because you do make me happy.*

*Yours always,*

*~Amelia*

Saturday, July 30

My Dear Amelia,

I am intent upon seeing you because, as I expressed at the theatre, you bring me comfort of a kind that I have found in no other place and no other person. I've been so terribly unhappy for such an incredibly long time,



Amelia, I feel as if I will soon die of nothing other than sadness. Without lifting a finger against my own person, my heart will simply cease for lack of hope. Nearly all the will that I can still muster, I muster for your sake. I daresay that I am keeping myself alive for long enough to see you one more time. Until that day, happiness and I shall remain the remotest of strangers.

Yours earnestly,  
-Didymus

*Saturday, July 30*

*I love you! We'll be able to see each other soon enough. But if you died, whatever it is you see in me would die too. I would love for you and me to be able to be together forever, but we both know that it probably can never be. So I want and I need for you to promise me that you'll never leave me. Not completely.*

*Love always,  
~Amelia*

Monday, August 1

My Dear Amelia,

You're indescribably precious. I carry the thought of you about me day and night—my shining talisman, upon which I meditate as I pass through these endless hours of woe. You are my St. Christopher's medallion, whispering interventions from my palm while I grope along this lightless chasm. How can I convey the way in which I cherish you? You are angelic—you bring with you the scent of Heaven—you bind me with the force that forged the constellations.

But anyone could tell you these things.

What attracts me to you—what causes me to hold you as sacred—is impossible to relate in this or any language. It would be tarnished by the attempt. I know that you are the answer for my loneliness, and that your finding me is the closest I may ever come to finding myself. And I hope that, by having you, I shall

finally feel as if I have had enough.

There is a secluded part of me which anticipates that you will guide me to the furthest boundaries of despair—desert me in my most shameful state, and give me no choice but to execute my own fate as I have always known I must.

Having lived this life up until this point, I know that my redemption and my reward, undeserving though I am of it, must be in loving you. Thank you, Amelia, for waiting for me. I give you my oath that it will not be forever. When our moment arrives, our compensation will be greater than either of us can imagine. We will forget entirely the despair of our days apart, and we will part again assured of ourselves, of each other, and of everything we questioned before.

You are not waiting for nothing, beloved Amelia. I swear it. We will be together.

Yours absolutely,

-Didymus

*Monday, August 1*

*Didymus,*

*Did you just, for the most part, promise me that we would be together? How? I don't see how you could even really think about promising me something like that. No matter how happy it would make me, I thought we both agreed that us being together wasn't possible. I love you and I do want to be with you, but you have to tell me what you are thinking. You definitely make me amazingly happy, and us being together would be a dream come true. I'm just surprised, I guess. In a good way.*

*I love you forever,  
~Amelia*

*Monday, August 8*

*My Dear Amelia,*

Once again, I've been far too long in writing. I've been so exceedingly depressed lately that the only words I could have

written to you would have been words of irrecoverable despair. I thought it best to keep my silence rather than dragging you down into the mire with me.

I hope you will be able to reply to this message tonight. I will be alone for the entire day tomorrow, at my mother-in-law's house, in S------. I don't know how close you are to S-----, or if you can find a way to be driven there, but if there's a chance of our meeting between the hours of 10:00 in the morning and 6:00 in the evening, whether at the residence, or in the town itself (I know a good rendezvous point), please consider coming to see me.

You can telephone me tonight up until 11:00, at my place of employment. I'll be the only one there.

Assuredly and eternally yours,  
-Didymus

*Monday, August 8*

*Didymus,*

*Tomorrow I will be in K----- from 7:45 a.m. to about 12:00 p.m. I won't be able to answer my phone, but you can call me and leave a message. You can also call me at my house any time after 1:15 p.m.*

*Why are you going to be alone at your mother-in-law's house tomorrow? I might be able to see you, but I don't know for sure, because my sister would be the one to transport me, and I don't know what she will be doing. Call me and I'll see what I can do.*

*Love always,  
~Amelia*

*Saturday, August 20*

*Damien,*

*So, you talked to me on the phone once, but now you haven't talked to me again for almost two weeks. I was expecting a note at least.*

*Next weekend, Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup>, there is a fair going on in the village, and I know that some people from the theatre will be there.*

*Considering I got the message from your wife inviting me along, I figured that I would ask if you were coming as well. I hope to see you there.*

*Love always and forever,  
~Amelia*

Sunday, August 21

My Dearest Amelia,

I admit that our telephone conversation left me a bit dumbfounded. Well, more than a bit. It was jarring to hear that your actual feelings for me were so vague, so undefined, so dispassionate and irresolute. I was hoping to hear you announce your love for me in more certain terms; something better, perhaps, than "I don't know."

I did so much talking during our hour-and-a-half on the line together that I have been firmly convinced that you had heard quite enough of me. I was astonished to receive another missive from you, in fact—so certain was I that our dialogue (and all

possibility of further dialogue) was utterly used up. After all of the tender sentiments we had traded by letter, it was difficult to realize that, though you may very well care for me sincerely, you could bring forth no words to express as much.

I am a man of words—a man who lives more in the realm of words than in that of actions. It is easy for me to expound upon my feelings, employing high language and lofty phrases. I want to offer you something, Amelia: I want to be worth something to you. But it may be of value to me to accustom myself to the idea that, whatever I have for you, words are not a factor of it.

I do still love you, and I am determined to show that love in whatever terms you are prepared to understand—as long as you also understand that I cannot leave my marriage. If you are able to accept the indissoluble fact of my remaining married, I am willing to accept the seemingly unavoidable

fact that conversation (in the way that I accustomed to conversing) is simply not possible—nor particularly necessary—between us. Our love is evidently meant to be acted upon, not spoken of. In this regard it appears that I have, since the origination of our correspondence, been the deluded one.

As for Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup>: It is quite likely that I will be in the village to assist the theatrical contingent with its display

booth. I will doubtless be accompanied by my daughter—as well, naturally, as my wife—which will make it difficult for us to find ourselves alone together, or to even be observed in the same company—considering my wife's persistent mistrust of you. But it will be a great relief and a great pleasure to glimpse you, providing it is at an innocent distance.

Yours very truly,  
-Didymus

THE END.